

Wm. Stewart.

THE LOVE OF GOD

"I desired oftentimes to learn what was our Lord's meaning. And I was answered in ghostly understanding, saying thus : *Would'st thou learn thy Lord's meaning in this thing ? Learn it well : Love was His meaning. Who showed it thee ? Love. What showed He thee ? Love. Wherefore showed it He ? For Love. Hold thee therein and thou shalt learn and know more in the same. But thou shalt never know nor learn therein other thing without end.* Thus was I learned that Love was our Lord's meaning."

*Revelations of Divine Love. Recorded
by Julian, Anchoress at Norwich.*

Anno Domini 1373.

THE LOVE OF GOD

BY

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"HOLY GROUND," "AT HOME IN THE BIBLE"

NOT THAT WE LOVED GOD, BUT THAT HE LOVED US

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"I came across a poor woman, carrying a child—a baby of some six weeks old. The mother was quite a girl herself. The baby was smiling up at her for the first time in its life, just at that moment ; and while I watched the woman she suddenly crossed herself, oh so devoutly ! 'What is it, my good woman ?' I asked her. 'Exactly as is a mother's joy when her baby smiles for the first time into her eyes, so is God's joy when one of His children turns and prays to Him for the first time, with all his heart !' This is what that poor woman said to me, almost word for word ; and such a deep thought it was—a thought in which the whole essence of Christianity was expressed in one flash—that is, the recognition of God as our Father, and of God's joy in men as His own children, which is the chief idea of Christ."

Fedor Dostoeffsky : "The Idiot."

"Heresy to the heretic, and religion to the orthodox, but the dust of the rose-petal belongs to the heart of the perfume seller."

From an Inscription by Abdul Fazl for a Temple in Kashmir.

TO
MY WIFE

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. SIC ENIM DILEXIT DEUS MUNDUM	I
II. HOW CAN WE BELIEVE IT?	14
III. THE POWER OF OUR LORD'S PASSION	24
IV. THE OUTLOOK OF JESUS CHRIST	33
V. BEHOLD YOUR GOD	43
VI. THINK IT NOT STRANGE	55
VII. OUT OF A DRY GROUND	70
VIII. LOVE'S CONSTRAINT	79
IX. BORN IN A BARN	93
X. THE SUPREMACY OF LOVE	103
XI. RESPECT OF PERSONS	112
XII. THE FATHER WHO SEETH IN SECRET	121
XIII. NOT DISOBEDIENT	129
XIV. THE PATIENCE OF GOD	137
XV. A GOODLY LENT	147
XVI. LOVE STRONGER THAN DEATH	159
XVII. TREASURE IN HEAVEN	171
XVIII. THE CHARGE OF GOD'S ELECT	179
XIX. THE SIN OF CONTEMPT	192
XX. MUCH SERVING	203

Contents

	PAGE
XXI. LOVE'S REWARD	213
XXII. THE TYRANNY OF TOOLS	226
XXIII. THE BRANDS OF THE LORD JESUS	236
XXIV. GREAT EXPECTATIONS	244
XXV. A DESIRE TO DEPART	261
EPILOGUE: DIES IRÆ—DIES AMORIS	270

I

SIC ENIM DILEXIT DEUS MUNDUM

Some have questioned whether the immortal words *God so loved the world* occur in St. John iii. 16 as a comment by the Evangelist, or whether they fell from our Lord's own lips. The Church, however, has always received the words as coming from His heart. For they convey the very pith and marrow of the Gospel. If we were asked for theology summarized in a sentence, most Christians would reply by quoting this text.

No other verse in the whole Bible sounds so trite and familiar. Yet though the syllables be worn threadbare by repetition, their substance is as fresh and young as eternity. We might as well call springtime hackneyed or complain that the morning

Sic Enim Dilexit Deus Mundum

star has grown stale. Preachers shrink from announcing this text, not because it is so commonplace, but because it is so profound and overwhelming. Serious Christians can appreciate Bishop Gore's confession: "I have always thought that the only very difficult dogma of the Church was the dogma that God is love."

God loves the world: here is the truth which many prophets and kings and righteous men groped after vainly, or laid hold of only in part. Heathen folk looked up and trembled at a dim, vast, awful Power above them; but the noblest and wisest pagans wondered wistfully whether the Power in darkness whom they guessed had anything akin to human affection and compassion and sympathy. Did the gods indeed remember and feel for the world, or did they lie apart as careless of mankind?

In Israel there were humble and holy men of old who sought and found their

Sic Enim Dilexit Deus Mundum

God, and knew themselves secure of His favour, and lived confident in His care. Yet the humblest and holiest Jew was tempted to consider himself the son of a chosen race, round which centred God's peculiar and exclusive regard. The Hebrew saints hardly dreamed that their God cared not only for Israel, but for all nations alike. The Psalmist had learned indeed to sing: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." But it needed One Who came out of the bosom of the Father to fill up the measure of the amazing truth and to say in effect, "The Lord pitieth not only them that fear Him, but them that fear Him not."

For *the world* embraces nothing narrower than this. It means not just our earthly home but its human tenants. Doubtless God takes delight in everything that He has made—in the flowers and the birds and the stars. Yet we cannot think of Him as loving them, in the sense in which He loves

Sic Enim Dilexit Deus Mundum

those beings whom He has created after His own image, whom He calls into the fellowship of His sons.

And hence there follows one corollary of the mysterious love of God. What does real love imply? You may care about a machine you have invented, or a book you have written; you grow fond of your old home, or your faithful dog, or your favourite horse; but you do not properly love them, in the same way in which you love your dearest friend. It is not possible. The idea of affection, in any true sense, postulates a certain likeness between its subject and its object. "Love is a personal thing, called out by persons, and exercised by persons." Love can be fully felt only by a person for another person who is to some extent of kindred nature. Thus, when we say that God loves the world, we really assume that human beings are, so to speak, on lovable terms with the Most High. They must possess some affinity with God

Sic Enim Dilexit Deus Mundum

for Him to be able to love them, and for them to be able to love Him in return. There must be some kind of divineness about our poor human nature, or else it could never become the object of the Divine solicitude. And so the Gospel which reveals the unutterable condescension of Deity implies a hardly less wonderful exaltation of humanity. What manner of creatures must these be, upon whom the Creator has thus set His heart ?

Yet consider what manner of beings men and women appear to one another. Nay, think what kind of person each of us secretly knows himself to be—how selfish, and sordid, and vain, and foolish, and thankless, and wilful—how poor and mean a soul at best—and then ask yourself : “ Why does God love me ? What makes Him care so intensely about me ? What reason is there for it ? What sense is there in it ? ” Even in the holiest characters we do not see everything that we could

Sic Enim Dilexit Deus Mundum

expect God to take delight in. And how far does the best man transcend the worst? Is there after all so very much difference, when they show side by side against the white light of perfection?

Nevertheless the Gospel reveals that God actually loves every man and woman and child in the wide world. For each single sinful human soul He has a passionate affection—not merely for the saints and heroes of the race, but for all men alike. Those we call gifted and those we despise as commonplace, those we revere as noble and those we scorn as vile, white men and black men and yellow men, English and Germans and Hottentots and Chinese—God loves them all. He loves each one of us, not because we deserve it but because we need it. He loves us in spite of what we are, and because of what He Himself is. This wonder beyond words rises above reason also. It is not a matter for logic; it is a mystery for adoration.

Sic Enim Dilexit Deus Mundum

Try to realize the innumerable inhabitants of the world. Try for a moment to imagine those dim masses of mankind who live unrecognized and die unrecorded. They find no stage and footlights, they wear no laurels. History never mentions who they were or what they did. After a few short years the place that knew them once knows them no more. For a little while they may have brief memory among a handful of survivors, who themselves must soon pass into oblivion. Wander round an ancient village churchyard and try to trace the lettering on its tombstones, weather-stained and moss-grown and time-worn. The rude forefathers of the hamlet have soon no memorials left except green mounds which cover the nameless dead.

And yet, if we believe the Gospel, we are confident that not one in all these obscure generations is forgotten by God. Each single man among them was once precious to his mother, and is eternally precious to

Sic Enim Dilexit Deus Mundum

his Maker. There is no respect of persons in the Everlasting Love. This supreme privilege and birth-right belongs to every human creature. The levelling fact about us all is not even our common mortality : it is the far more strange and awful fact that God Almighty has loved each separate soul with a passionate personal affection, which carries in itself the seal and pledge of immortal life.

For the love of God is not indiscriminate, like sunshine. It is personal love, with the peculiar warmth and generosity and intimacy and vitality which belong to personal love. It is an individual ardour, which isolates each of its separate objects and recognizes that object as lovable. In every single human being God perceives something worth loving. No characterization of people is more false and hateful than to say—as we often say—that “there is nothing in them.” In each of them there is a sacred innermost room. Every man re-

Sic Enim Dilexit Deus Mundum

mains a mystery, even to the friends who come closest to him and know him best. For he carries in his heart a secret chamber, to which no other person is able to win admission. He can never explain himself to his companions and neighbours, try as he may; and on their side they never fully understand him. Perhaps one reason is that they never perfectly love him. Affection is the final key to unlock the mysteries of human nature, and God alone understands each man utterly, because God alone is able to love each man to the uttermost.

Thus, by virtue of his creation, every human being stands isolated with his Maker. Each one of us can come to God alone and apart, and can speak with Him face to face, and can say "*my* God." The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ never thinks about His countless children in the mass. The Creator has a separate care concerning each separate soul. Each man is made after

Sic Enim Dilexit Deus Mundum

the fashion of no one else ; and when he is perfected he shall receive from God a new name, which no one else is able to understand. God's predestinating love whispers in his heart, " I have called thee by name ; thou art Mine."

In her *Life of Edward Irving*¹ Mrs. Oliphant tell us how he once went to visit a young man in Glasgow who was dying of consumption. When he entered the sick-room, the great preacher went up to the bed-side, and looking into the face of the patient said softly, but earnestly, " George, God loves you ; be assured of this, *God loves you.*" After the visitor had left, the young man's sister came in and found her brother in a tearful ecstasy not to be described. " What do you think ? Mr. Irving says God loves me ! " cried the dying lad, overwhelmed with the confused pathetic joy of that great discovery which had brought glory into the chamber of death.

¹ Vol. ii, p. 87.

Sic Enim Dilexit Deus Mundum

God so loved, that He gave. Because love in the abstract is no more than a name, a mere concept, a vague tepid sentiment. It means nothing until we taste it and test it in experience. To measure your friend's affection you recall how he has proved it by his deeds ; how he took pains to help you ; how he gave up other interests for your society ; how he shared your troubles with his sympathy, and carried your burdens by his patience ; how quietly he stepped down into the second place that you might take the first ; how freely he spent himself and poured himself out for your sake. Love does not ultimately stop short of this. Even our poor mortal affection only comes to its own in sacrifice ; it lives and moves and has its being in giving itself away.

With the love of God it is not otherwise. We never realize this Divine passion as an abstract dogma ; we only know it by what it has dared and suffered for the sake of men. *God so loved, that He gave.* We

Sic Enim Dilexit Deus Mundum

cannot explain the ineffable Act whereby God gave His Son and God's Son gave Himself. We can but speak of it in parables and think of it in symbols ; yet our thoughts and phrases shadow forth the eternal reality. Henceforth the love of God is no mystical vision but an Agony, a Sacrifice, a Surrender which men's eyes have seen and their hands have handled and their hearts can never forget—in spite of everything on earth which seems to contradict it and give it the lie. The New Testament discloses the Divine affection as expressed in the Divine anguish. Many years ago I wandered into a little Breton Cathedral, and found a side-chapel which was bare and empty. It had no altar and no priest : but carved on the stone wall hung a Figure of the Crucified, and underneath was written, *C'est ainsi qu'il m'a aimé*, " He loved me like this."

The grand crisis in every man's experience, the era he must henceforth date from, occurs when the truth that his Creator

Sic Enim Dilexit Deus Mundum

loves him passes into a supreme conviction. "In that part of the book of memory there is a rubric which says: *Incipit Vita Nova.*" Those who have tasted the unspeakable gift know that God's love is a consuming fire of personal tenderness, which we can never escape and never destroy. People are often tempted to envy someone who was born in the purple, heir to a coronet and a fortune. But what do such trifles count for, compared with this supreme dignity, this royal birth-right, which not even our sins have power to cancel? Just because we are human creatures, it is our awful, incredible privilege to be the objects of God's everlasting love, whereof the Cross is the measure and the pledge. Herein lies the final mystery of faith. From the beginning God has always loved us, and He will go on loving us beyond the end.

II

HOW CAN WE BELIEVE IT?

“In a world like this, and for creatures such as we are, the Gospel of God’s everlasting love sounds incredible. We would believe it, if we could: but alas! it is no more than a beautiful dream. Too many black, bitter facts of experience conspire to give it the lie.”

The incredulity which such words express is generally created by certain definite impressions as to the nature of things. Let us consider two or three concrete experiences which exemplify the difficulties of faith.

Everyone has read about the historic earthquake at Lisbon. On All Saints’ Day, 1755, without warning the city was suddenly laid in ruins; then a tidal wave rushed up the river Tagus, and completed the

How Can we Believe It ?

destruction of 60,000 victims. That tragedy made a deep and enduring impression throughout Europe. In those days Portugal was linked to our own country by many intimate ties. English invalids used to resort there in search of health, and visitors like Henry Fielding and Philip Doddridge had found graves at Lisbon not long before the great calamity. It has been said that the news of the Lisbon earthquake produced more effect on men's minds in England than all the speculations of the deists. Goethe was at the time a boy, only six years old, under his father's roof at Frankfurt; but he himself tells us how his childish reliance on God's omnipotent goodness suffered a violent shock, when he came to understand that so many human beings had been killed with swift, indiscriminating fury by a convulsion of nature. Voltaire at Ferney was profoundly stirred by the event. According to Lord Morley "one of the most sincere, energetic, and

How Can we Believe It ?

passionate pieces in the whole literature of the eighteenth century " is Voltaire's poem, *Le Désastre de Lisbonne*. He felt the horror of it as keenly as if Geneva had been destroyed at his own gates. He tore to pieces the cheap optimism of those philosophers who proclaimed, like *Candide*, that everything was for the best in the best possible of worlds. Did God's benevolence inflict this awful blow ? Was it a judgment, a retribution ? " If so, why is Lisbon in ashes while Paris dances ? " To Voltaire the problem seemed desperate and insoluble. His poem provoked a shallow protest from Rousseau ; but Rousseau could only suggest that what we ignorantly call evil is but a relative thing and may perhaps prove to be good in disguise after all. Voltaire had insight enough to perceive that, at any rate relatively to us poor human creatures, the existence of pain and misery and wholesale death is a horrible reality.

How Can we Believe It ?

Moreover the Lisbon earthquake is only one among the cataclysms of nature which have devastated whole provinces and wiped out myriads of living beings. No science can predict visitations like these, no precautions can avert them. Titanic forces lie dozing under our planet's crust. Suddenly, apart from any act of man, the pillars of the earth tremble, and multitudes lie crushed as under the naked hand of God.

Such calamities force home upon us afresh the ancient dilemma of faith, because they appear on so huge a scale to impeach our faith that God is perfect love. We may reflect that, after all has been said, the religious problem involved depends in no way on the scale or extent of the calamity. It is precisely the same problem which Christ Himself recognized in His question concerning those eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell. Nay, it is the problem which meets us daily in each individual case where innocence seems confounded

How Can we Believe It ?

with guilt in a common disaster. So long as we are strangers and pilgrims upon earth we can receive no complete or final explanation of the mystery. We can but bow our heads and worship the inscrutable Will of God. In Him we move and have our being, moment by moment. In His hand are all our lives—whether He chooses that we die singly or that we die by multitudes at once.

Consider, again, what suffering is involved in the evolution of living creatures. Darwin, indeed, did not say the last word about this doctrine which he made coherent and popular. But no modern man of science will deny that a perpetual struggle for existence belongs to the creative purpose, or that hunger and pain and death are everywhere tragic factors in securing the survival of the fittest. The process of animate life has been described as “a conjugation of the verb to eat, in the active and passive.” Mill’s terrible indictment of

How Can we Believe It ?

the cruelty of nature may be too sensational, but Martineau's attempt to palliate that cruelty remains unconvincing ; while we have some apologists so zealous to assert eternal Providence and justify the ways of God that they explain away suffering, almost like disciples of Mrs. Eddy. Men who spend their lives, not among books, but on the edge of the wilderness, realize that nature is literally red in tooth and claw. And they must needs ask themselves : " Does God indeed take pleasure in the struggle and anguish of the dumb creatures that He has made ? " William Blake puts the poignant question, to which we have no answer :

Tiger ! tiger ! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry ?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And water'd heaven with their tears,
Did He smile His work to see?
Did He Who made the lamb make thee?

How Can we Believe It ?

There is something more, however, to be said. From one point of view, nature appears ruthless and inexorable, without pity or mercy or relenting—an inhuman power which has no heart. On the other hand, it is necessary to notice that we are here using the term “nature” as opposed to man; whereas in reality we ourselves are part and parcel of nature. So that in a wider and truer sense nature includes humanity, and it must therefore be credited with all the justice and kindness belonging to the family of mankind, together with “all the pity that they have accumulated and, as it were, capitalized” in institutions—political, social, ecclesiastical—for doing good.

Yet with this wider outlook we confront also the darker problem of moral evil and retribution. If we credit nature with the sum-total of human goodness, we must bring into account the sum-total of all human wickedness as well. But who can imagine those long centuries of corruption

How Can we Believe It ?

and cruelty and havoc, of which history records mere fragments ? Who can measure the sins of the world ? We shudder when we try to recall only a few names among the tyrants and tormentors of mankind. Yet think of those primitive despots in ancient Egypt and Assyria, whose proud, cruel, stony faces haunt our museums. Think of scourges of nations like Attila the Hun and Ivan the Terrible, and the catalogue of devastating Sultans and Kings and Kaisers. Think of moral monsters like Alexander VI, the Borgia Pope, and Torquemada, the Spanish Inquisitor. Think of that chief executioner of the Bolshevik Red Police, just gone to his account, Dzerzhinsky—whose torturings and murderings have outrun computation. How can the Judge of all the earth tolerate these things ? If Almighty God be indeed pure love and perfect goodness, why did He entrust His creatures with such awful liberty to torment and defile and enslave and destroy ?

How Can we Believe It ?

To passionate, irrepressible questions like these God Himself vouchsafes to give us no complete answer. His prophets and apostles confess that they know only in part. Even His supreme self-disclosure in Jesus Christ does not unveil the whole mystery of things. Nevertheless, in the Gospel we can hear the accents of Divine Love speaking to reassure us in this wise: "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot hear them now. As yet, it is not possible for you to fathom the full meaning of your own existence, to understand the end of evil and to learn the secret of sorrow. Not even I can make them plain to you in mortal speech. Yet one thing I can do, and I will do: I Myself will come and share these intolerable things with you, I Myself will endure them for you. I Myself will enter into everything which My children suffer. I will undergo their curse and agony and misery. I will bear away the sins of the world."

How Can we Believe It ?

The countenance of the universe often appears like an immense tragic mask, cold and rigid and menacing, which conceals some dreadful secret if it has any meaning at all. Until suddenly eyes of Eternal Love are gazing upon us through the hollow sockets, and from the frozen lips proceeds a voice like the sound of many waters, chanting the infinite Self-sacrifice of God.

III

THE POWER OF OUR LORD'S PASSION

As often as we draw near in spirit to the place that is called Calvary we become aware of the warning, "Take thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Christians will confess, "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." On the solemn anniversary of Christ's death there grew up a widespread custom in the Church not to celebrate the Lord's Supper. For on Good Friday the chief act of worship was perforce the adoration of the Cross. When we survey that wondrous Cross we come face to face with the Body which was given and the Blood which was shed, once for all. And the response of

The Power of our Lord's Passion

faithful hearts must be : " O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord."

To adore does not mean to explain. Above all human categories, the true Cross rises eternal and inscrutable. We have no thoughts wherewith to measure its breadth and length and depth and height. According to the New Testament, the oblation of Jesus Christ is linked with transcendent causes and consequences which the eyes of angels vainly seek to penetrate. In His mysterious dying conflict our Lord wrestled not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places. The timeless self-sacrifice of the Absolute Life was enacted on the stage of time, and forced upon the consciousness of dim-eyed men in its awful reality. Those who watched at Calvary through the hours of darkness felt that the earth did quake and the rocks were rent and the graves opened,

The Power of our Lord's Passion

because what was done there shook not the earth only, but also heaven. And as often as Jesus Christ has been evidently set forth crucified before our eyes, we too are aware of the very powers of the world to come. Here we discover that pain itself is essential to the Life of omnipotent perfection.¹ Here, as nowhere else, we stand confronted by the power, might, majesty, and dominion of the redeeming love of God.

The Passion of our Lord is something far greater than any Divine message. It is a Divine act—God's supreme act of atonement and retrieval. The apostles saw in that

¹ *The Times* of July 30, 1926, published a photograph of "the finely sculptured head which has been discovered in the cloisters of the ruined fifth-century Christian basilica at Jerash, Transjordan, and is thought by Professor Garstang, Director of Antiquities in Palestine, to be the earliest known representation of the bearded Christ. The head probably dates from the second century, and although it bears considerable resemblance to well-known representations of Zeus, the marked expression of pain in the face distinguishes the head from the classic convention."

The Power of our Lord's Passion

Passion not only a sacrifice, but a victory. In that hour of its extremest triumph, evil suffered its decisive defeat. "Blackness, darkness, and despair, and sorrow blotting out God's hand, and feebleness sinking without a stay: these are not failure. In these characters were written first the charter of our deliverance: these are the characters in which it is renewed." ¹ He Who died for our sins was never so mighty as when He refused to save Himself. To us who are being saved the word of the Cross is the energy of God. It reveals the unspeakable work which He has wrought for men—His judgment upon our evil, His reversal of our guilt, His restoration of our fall. Hereby know we that He has power on earth to forgive sins. And this Divine assurance goes far deeper than theories: it stands rooted in our elemental life.

Therefore it is that the Passion of Jesus Christ becomes most mighty in its appeal

James Hinton, *The Mystery of Pain*.

The Power of our Lord's Passion

to mankind. The former Master of Balliol recognized this with characteristic insight and candour. In one of his letters, Jowett confessed that "neither utilitarian philosophers nor German theologians have ever found a substitute for that which they are displacing. . . . They have never got hold of the heart of the world." Now it is over the heart of the world that Christ crucified exercises such undying power. Lifted up, He draws men unto Himself. His Cross has proved the most potent moral force of which history makes mention. Sinful and burdened folk can never turn away their eyes from the Man of Sorrows; and those on whom He lays His wounded Hands are healed and cleansed and kindled and possessed by redeeming Love. Their characters are transformed into His image, "just as iron exposed to the fire glows like the fire on account of its union with the fire." In so far as imputed righteousness means that we are saved by the righteousness of

The Power of our Lord's Passion

Another Whom we worship, it is true. Not mere admiration but passionate devotion grafts Him on us, so that in Him and by Him we live.¹

Herein we touch the nerve-centre of Christian ethics. In the Cross stands revealed the one reality by which all other things are judged. Our right attitude towards the sins and the virtues, the pain and the happiness of others is that we should feel them as if they were our own. Because God Himself does so feel them : He has made them His own.

Those men and women who have exemplified the Christian spirit most brilliantly and unconsciously, have for the most part cared little for Christian morality as a code of law, but they have cared everything for the mystical and emotional elements in their faith. They have understood that "great deeds and great thoughts spring from the heart." St. Paul calls Christian virtues the

¹ Mark Rutherford, *John Bunyan*, p. 115.

The Power of our Lord's Passion

fruits of the Spirit, and not its works. The fruit must grow on the tree, as Luther declared, or it will be dead and rotten. It is most significant that the Reformers habitually dealt with Christian ethics as the outcome of Christian gratitude. Herein they followed the teaching of the New Testament in true apostolic succession. Gwatkin writes in regard to the morality which the Apostles taught: "They seem to think that if only they can fill men with thankfulness for the gift of life in Christ, morality will take care of itself." For affection is the strongest dynamic in the world. There is no sharper spur to action than the dread lest we should seem ungrateful or unkind to one who loves us. The glance of disappointment, the tone of sadness, that testify to a wound we have inflicted thrill us with contrition and remorse. To this personal touch, to this appeal of an immediate Presence, the awakened soul makes its most ardent, most heroic response. And Christian experience

The Power of our Lord's Passion

testifies to the secret motive of the saints : they recoil from evil, because they realize that sin is an insult and an outrage against the Crucified.

The Bible is a volcanic book. In its familiar passages, macadamized by use and wont, there is incandescent lava close below the surface ; and so men clutch at commentators, "to support uneasy steps over the burning marl." The New Testament can never be understood so long as we read it in cold blood. It means little to us until we catch something of the fervour and vehemency of its writers, until we kindle with their flame. Christianity makes scarcely any appeal to hard, calculating common sense. Its doctrines and precepts and promises are all pitched in an impassioned key. They grow coherent and credible when we bring them to the foot of the Cross, where alone they find their justification and their commentary. A religion without tears is as foreign to the genius of

The Power of our Lord's Passion

the Gospel as it is to the tragic facts of life. Did not our Lord's Passion come home to us more mightily than ever during days and months and years of bloodshed, amid the tumult and agony of a world at war? For it was then that, deep down in the roots of our being, we began dimly to realize the kingdom and the power and the glory of sacrifice. Amid that horror of great darkness we caught a vision of how our human sinning and suffering and dying can be redeemed and transfigured through the victorious love and anguish of God.

IV

THE OUTLOOK OF JESUS CHRIST

In the Gospel records of Jesus we meet with certain sayings which seem, almost unconsciously, to betray the attitude and outlook of His own spirit. A single phrase, uttered half-aside, shows how His thoughts are working. Some incidental sentence opens up a glimpse into the very heart of the Son of God. Thus, when He rebuked the men of Nazareth in the synagogue where He had worshipped Sabbath by Sabbath since His childhood, our Lord let fall words which shed a strange light on His inner mind: *many widows were in Israel, in the days of Elias . . . many lepers were in Israel, in the time of Eliseus*. As Christ gazed backward across the centuries, Palestine appeared to Him as if it were peopled with two types of human misery—the most foully diseased, and the most bitterly bereft.

The Outlook of Jesus Christ

What vistas of suffering the words unfold—so many women pierced with the sword of immedicable sorrow, so many pariahs bearing in their bodies the curse of a living death. Yet how calmly Christ surveys that spectacle! He measures its dreadful meaning in the present as well as in the past. And yet “we do not see any disturbance in our Lord’s mind at the vast number of afflicted people who came to Him. It is said He had compassion on them; but there is no surprise mentioned at the existence of these ills.”¹ Many widows and many lepers of Israel were living and moving round about Him, uncleansed and unconsolated, and about them all we can confidently say, *Behold, how He loved them.* To us the accumulated troubles of the world often appear as vast, cloudy masses before which our keenest sympathy grows blunted and dulled. But the love of Christ isolates each separate sufferer, and remem-

¹ General Gordon.

The Outlook of Jesus Christ

bers every pang, and counts up every tear. In His heart those widows must have had a place of their own. If tradition be trusted, His Mother was now herself a widow, and her Son had learned at home to weep with them that weep. He smiled on a widow's mite, and He branded with burning words the widows' oppressors, and once, at the gateway of Nain, He made a widow's heart to sing for joy. Among all the children whom Christ called and caressed, surely He must have said with double tenderness, "Suffer the orphans to come unto Me." And so also He Who Himself took our sicknesses was moved with special compassion for the misery of the lepers. He laid His own hands on that loathsome, malignant disease which we shudder even to imagine. Origen records a saying of the Good Physician which the evangelists have omitted: *For them that are sick, I was sick.* How He must have longed to heal every human malady, and to wipe away

The Outlook of Jesus Christ

tears from off all faces! Yet few facts about Christ appear more significant than His silent restraint in the use of His power. Isaac Taylor has remarked how all our Lord's acts of mercy seem "done by the way," like the passing beneficences of One who may not tarry on the greater errand which He hastens to fulfil. In old time His prophets sat dumb and astonished before the onset of national calamity. But Christ sees in all this immense anguish nothing to disconcert Him or distract Him from the mission which He had just announced in the synagogue—to *bind up the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives . . . to comfort all that mourn. And when He says quietly, many widows . . . many lepers,* He speaks with the calm accent of a Conqueror, who can afford to report "many casualties" because He discerns already that His warfare is accomplished and His victory won.

For many thoughtful and sensitive

The Outlook of Jesus Christ

minds to-day the intolerable moral problem appears not so much in the remorse which visits the wicked as in the sorrow which falls upon the innocent. The New Testament, indeed, warns us that this is to mistake the real centre of gravity in the Gospel. We are redeemed, first and foremost, from our guilt and condemnation. Men need to be forgiven more even than they need to be comforted. Yet the same Passion of Almighty Love, which retrieves and reverses human sin, avails also to justify human pain. No other justification has been discovered. We still sometimes hear the hoary argument of Job's friends, that suffering must be counted as a proof and penalty of personal ill-doing. But the facts stubbornly refuse to come under such a theory. There is no breath of blame in our Lord's voice when He points to these many lepers, many widows, all stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. They at least had never rejected the prophets, for unto

The Outlook of Jesus Christ

none of them was a prophet sent. But their shattered, blighted lives bear witness that original grief enters into the world's great fabric as really as original sin. Christ Himself does not attempt to explain the sombre threads of suffering which are woven so thickly into the texture of human experience. He says, indeed, *an enemy hath done this*, and then stops short, as though we were able to receive nothing further. Scripture gives us only broken hints of some mysterious wreck and ruin in which the physical as well as the moral universe had its share. But there exists no adequate philosophy of suffering. We may admit that "in the world as it is, there is almost nothing worth having which can be won or maintained except at the cost of pain. As Pamela's parents said to her: 'O my child! Trials are sore things; and yet, without them, we know not ourselves, nor what we are able to do.' " ¹ But to recog-

¹ Bishop Gore, *Belief in God*, p. 100.

The Outlook of Jesus Christ

nize this stern law does not explain why such a law must exist. And when preachers dilate on the lessons of endurance and the blessed discipline of bereavement, they forget that no sight is so common as that of unsanctified sorrow and unchastening pain—which yield no peaceable fruit of righteousness, but only bitterness and rebellion of spirit. After everything has been said which can be said, the poignant mystery remains. In spite of all our progress, *man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery*. Neither philosophers nor theologians have discovered any sufficient reason why. At least we will never accept the cold platitudes, the shallow optimism, of those who can talk glibly about all things being ordered for the best, because their hearts have never been torn with real anguish nor their lives wrecked by a crushing blow.

When we meditate and seek to know these things, sometimes they grow too

The Outlook of Jesus Christ

painful for us: we recoil, and turn our thoughts away from such intolerable questioning. There are wards in certain hospitals, for example, where few of us have courage to linger and brood. During the Great War who could endure to remember how every single name in those endless lists of the killed and wounded must stab quivering hearts at home? The martyrdom of man, as Winwood Reade called it, is an agonizing, bewildering fact, "a vision to dizzy and appal." Yet our Lord Himself faced it, without quailing or faltering. With infinite compassion He watched the multitudes passing before His eyes in sad procession from the cradle to the grave. He counted all the legions of the great army, whose banners are inscribed *Les Misérables*. Gently and tenderly He looked out on this poor earth—

Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,

and uttered the amplest of all His beatitudes,

The Outlook of Jesus Christ

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

We are not admitted to peer into God's final secrets of restoration and consolation. Perhaps "the world would not go on, if God revealed all His secrets." But assuredly Christ discerned that which gave value to human sorrow and crying, and made them worth while in the end. He reckoned that as this earth might be morally poorer without its poverty, so it would be spiritually a more barren place without its tears. The Gospel has a profound congruity with these dark, tormenting facts, which nevertheless it does not attempt to explain. But it bids us believe that there is a fathomless necessity for the suffering and misery and death which press upon humanity, because God's own Love has stooped to endure them all. No one else ever faced the inexplicable anguish of the world so calmly as the Man of Sorrows. And when we "turn from life's most perplexed and sorrowful contra-

The Outlook of Jesus Christ

dictions, we are met from the eyes and brow of Him Who was indeed acquainted with grief by a look of solemn recognition, such as may pass between friends who have endured together some strange and secret sorrow, and are through it united in a bond which cannot be broken." His Divine travail has embraced the sufferings as well as the sins of the whole world. And our only peace and joy are grounded in the confidence that, as Christ sees of that travail, He can be satisfied.

V

BEHOLD YOUR GOD

When we meditate on present-day Christianity, of which we ourselves form part, we may recognize that it often suffers not so much from a lack of zeal as from an error in emphasis and direction. To put the point quite bluntly, many earnest, religious people suffer themselves to be diverted and distracted from the chief end of religion—which must be nothing short of God Himself. We do not mean for a moment that such people have given up their belief and turned materialists, we do not suggest that they have grown worldly and selfish and proud. It is rather that they have somehow lost touch with the living Heart of all things. Religion does a great deal for them, but it fails to keep them in

Behold Your God

contact with the personal reality of God's love.

This spiritual failure may come about from various causes. Not a few very sincere believers suffer loss from a habit of undue introspection. Some temperaments are taken up with their own conceptions and experiences of Christian truth, instead of fixing their eyes on Him Whose name is Faithful and True. Some men still miss their God in the business of discussing Him and defining Him. They attend to the process rather than to the result. They analyse their own faith, they trust to their own convictions, instead of forgetting themselves in faith's living Object. Or they rely on some inward experience of redemption, in place of adoring Him Who is their Redeemer. Whereas it is characteristic of the Gospel that it points us away from ourselves to One Who is far above us and beyond us, One Who does for us all that we ourselves can never do. Salvation comes

Behold Your God

from without; and the watchword of salvation is not "Behold your creed, your theology, your experience," but "Behold your God."

Again, there are Christians of another school who miss their path and go astray in the Scriptures, because they continually search the Bible for what it was never intended to contain. Some men read it as an anthology of magnificent literature, some treat it like a primer of science, some even degrade it into an almanac of predictions. But the Bible fulfils a far more sacred and glorious function. In the words of one of our modern prophets, "Holy Scripture is either the gradual unveiling of God, or it is nothing." For it forms our only record of those great redeeming and revealing acts wherein God has manifested His nature and His will to mankind. And the whole purpose of Scripture is to carry us, while we read, beyond the record into personal contact and fellowship with the Redeemer

Behold Your God

and Revealer. The New Testament unfolds the mystery of the Divine Incarnation and Passion, and cries, "Behold your God—the God of Love in the Man of Sorrows, Who bears away the sin of the world." Here, and here alone, are disclosed the secrets of eternity. Revelation, as Robertson Smith insisted, is not a supernatural communication of doctrine; it is "the direct personal message of God's love to *me*." And thus it comes to pass that those faithful students of revelation, who deserve to be called "Bible Christians," escape from being entangled among variant readings or polyglot versions or critical commentaries. Because they use the Scriptures as a sacrament, by means of which they live habitually in the presence of the living God. Day by day such a one worships God's awful holiness, His perfect beauty, His heart-piercing demands, His unutterable love—until the man's life "becomes a sort of chant, rich, deep, awe-struck, passionately humble," as his

Behold Your God

being grows purified in the flame which consumes all selfishness at last.

“Behold your God” ought to be the burden of theology. These pages, which are borrowed from the day-book of spiritual experience, make no attempt to deal formally with theological definitions and speculations. It is true, however, that the foundation of Christian theology—the doctrine that God is love—does contain profound implications in regard to the very nature of Deity. Can we conceive of God as a Being without beginning, Who existed before all things? Was He loving then, when there was nothing for Him to love? For love, as we know it, has no meaning amid sheer solitude. In that unthinkable eternity was God lonely? Then how can we affirm that from everlasting God was love? To our human thoughts such a mystery seems to imply “the mystical conception that in His own nature there was something analogous to self-expression, something which

Behold Your God

begets and beholds what it has begotten.”¹ Because love in its essence is social, Christians are led to conceive of a Divine Sodality inherent in the ultimate essence of God.

To some readers these sentences may convey little meaning and less conviction. Christians will refuse to be drawn aside from the Source and Object of love into abstract discussions concerning His nature. For theologians often obscure their sacred theme, because they try to translate the relations of living personalities into the terms of an intellectual equation. They deal with the Gospel as though it were a philosophy of truth, or a system of moral laws. They annotate the Sermon on the Mount, for example, as though they had never come

¹ G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, pp. 261, 262, which continues : “ Athanasius was really contending for a God of love against a God of colourless and remote cosmic control, the God of the stoics and the agnostics, the isolated and simplified Deity of Islam. He was contending for the balance of interdependence and intimacy in that Trinity of the Divine Nature which ‘ turns even God into a Holy Family.’ ”

Behold Your God

within sight or sound of the Preacher ; and then they seek to exhibit His words as a blending of various poetic ideas and spiritual axioms, most of which may be traced back to earlier sages. But the authority of the Sermon on the Mount lives on His lips Who spake as never man spake. Christianity can never be reduced to a religion of doctrines, articulated in terms of their content. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not any system of doctrines, nor the belief in them. Faith that saves the soul is living personal trust in a living Person, Who brings God to men and brings men to God.

When we consider the matter more closely, we begin to recognize that our life, as Bishop Creighton used to insist, is the development of our personality ; and this personality, however we define it, is something much more than the sum-total of our observed qualities. After all, the vital problem for every man concerns the forma-

Behold Your God

tion and nurture of his personality. This it is which explains and justifies the nature of God's self-revelation in Christ. We may discover God in nature, or in history, or in our own consciences. But if He is ever to be known aright, He must be known as a person. And therefore Christ stands forth as "the central fount of personality," Who interprets not my gifts, my attainments, my knowledge, my capacities, but my inner self—that which lies beyond these, and uses them, and gives them their meaning and coherence. For what makes me in this world? My personal relations to other persons. What cheers me? The belief that some, at least, love me. What gives me any value in my own eyes? The sense of my influence over, and my usefulness to, one or two of those who love me. Personal relationships, founded on a sense of lasting affection, are the sole realities of life. This truth is the burden of all great literature; and it points straight to Christ.

Behold Your God

In my relation to the living King of Love all my other relationships find their meaning and their security.¹

To-day we are in the midst of a many-sided revival of institutional Christianity, a movement which brings us rich new blessings and also involves us in strange and subtle perils. Nothing is more common—or more cheap and shallow—than for men to pour contempt on the modern Church, to point scornfully at its timidity, its routine, its divisions, its failures. Yet the scattered fellowship of the faithful persists through human generations. The flock of the Eternal Shepherd survives, still bearing its own supernatural testimony. So long as the Church produces saints, as it certainly does—so long as the love of Christ appears manifestly working in Christian lives and characters—the Church is indestructible: the tabernacle of God is

¹ Most of this paragraph is condensed from passages in *The Life and Letters of Maundrell Creighton*.

Behold Your God

with men. Nevertheless, there always remains a danger that we should exalt the formal side of Christianity at the expense of those living personal relationships—Divine and human—which religious institutions and ceremonies and creeds have been developed to nourish and foster, but which they often stifle and bury out of sight. We dare never forget that our Lord transcends His visible Church. He is not imprisoned within its limits, nor enslaved by its decrees, nor fettered by its rules and ritual. And therefore, like the Bible, the Church cannot possibly be an end in itself. Nay, it exists that it may bear witness to Him Who is the First and the Last and the Living One—Himself the Defender of its faith, the Director of its mission, the Builder of its fabric, the Author and Sustainer of its life.

Preachers of the Gospel preach amiss unless they realize that the Lord Whom they declare can declare Himself without

Behold Your God

their aid, and that if it were not so He would be no Lord at all. If they should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out. For He is able out of the very stones to create His vessels of election, able to transform flinty souls into evangelists of His grace and glory. So, amid all the complex mechanism of Christian service, we may well take heed lest in our activities we lose sight of their supreme End. Not long ago an energetic English bishop confessed that "we are all in danger of being snowed under by machinery," and called for a special mission to bring his diocese back to God. Those Christians who have wrought most mightily to heal the wounds of the world have prevailed by virtue of their own mystical union with the Everlasting Lover and Redeemer of souls. And the only voice that can reach the hearts of sinning, suffering, dying men and women is the voice that cries out, of the depths of inward experience, "Behold your God ! "

Behold Your God

Concerning the effect of the vision which came to him in Patmos, the Christian prophet wrote: *When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.* On those words a wise preacher has commented: "It is good to be brought to the feet of Jesus Christ. It is better still to lie there, sick and sorrowful. It is best of all to fall at His feet as dead."

VI

THINK IT NOT STRANGE

In this tangled and bewildering world we encounter many things which appear mysterious, which we have no skill to explain. How often, for example, people tell you about some startling coincidence, or some unaccountable presentiment which came true ; and such experiences do occur. Now and again you are staggered when you read about an amazing discovery, or hear of a monstrous crime. Sometimes you wake up from a dream which is so weird and uncanny to remember that you can only murmur " How strange ! " Then also there come seasons of anxious thought when we strain our eyes painfully and try to peer into that dim future which no man has skill to forecast. The dawn of each

Think it Not Strange

new year creates a curious sense of strangeness. We stand on its threshold like pilgrims, with an untrodden country to explore. We can see but a few steps along the shadowy road. Who of us knows what may be waiting close in front of him? Day by day we have to live on the brink of to-morrow, when anything may happen. As poor Mr. Tulliver confessed, this is "a puzzling world." Surely the ways of God's providence are strange.

Moreover, the present generation feels burdened and beset with perplexities of its own. It is true, indeed, that each generation in turn considers itself elect and exceptional, as though upon it the ends of the world were come. Yet something may be forgiven to people who have lived through the last decade, if they believe that in no common fashion they have been helping to make history. During those heart-breaking years of bloodshed and bereavement and deadly peril, many of us

Think it Not Strange

endured more than we could have imagined possible. And to-day, amid the confusions and disappointments which have followed the War, who need blame us if we are tempted to think it all intolerably strange? A Hebrew prophet spoke of "the cup of astonishment," and surely we who are alive now have drained that cup to its dregs. In politics and commerce and industry, nothing seems certain to happen except the unexpected. And in matters which concern us more closely still, we are experiencing other changes quite as perplexing and portentous. For multitudes of people it seems as though moral standards were shifting, as though spiritual values had lost their stability. In ethics, in economics, in art, everything is treated as an open question. The axioms of mathematics have become debatable, no less than the bed-rock of civilized society. Middle-aged men and women wake up bewildered to discover all round them a new world of revolu-

Think it Not Strange

tionary ideas. They are ready to echo the cry of the old tragic poet: "The sacred streams flow backward to their fountains, and the order of nature is perverted, and faith in the gods is gone."

Nevertheless, it remains true that we are always far too prone to exaggerate our own trials, and to look upon ourselves as somehow oppressed and weighed down beyond our fathers. There are some sensational preachers not ashamed to talk as though the War had killed men's faith in God. Yet the Bible alone might remind them that battle and massacre and bloodshed on a vast scale are no novelties in the world. Nay, the modern lessons and warnings of horrors such as these had been set forth with lurid clearness before most of us were born. Three-quarters of a century ago Carlyle wrote in words of fire everything that people have been repeating since the Armistice about the spiritual bankruptcy of Europe, about the need for religious

Think it Not Strange

reconstruction, about a change of heart in nations and governments as the sole alternative to complete disaster. His famous *Latter Day Pamphlets* appeared just after the national revolutionary movements of 1848-9 had collapsed in tragic failure. On the opening pages of that volume stand sentences which might have been preached last week : " There must be a new world, if there is to be a world at all ! That human beings in our Europe can ever return to the old sorry routine, and proceed with any steadiness or continuance there ; this small hope is not now a tenable one. These days of universal death must be days of universal newbirth, if the ruin is not to be total and final ! " As we read him again, after so long a time, how vividly Carlyle illuminates St. Paul's warning : " I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that *all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea.*"

For the truth is, each new generation

Think it Not Strange

falls into the ancient sin of self-pity. Every age utters the like complaint and chants a fresh variant of the old monk's rhyme, *Hora novissima, tempora pessima*. We delude ourselves when we imagine that we live in a supreme crisis of spiritual difficulty. The same dark facts of evil and misery have been challenging men's faith for thousands of years. As Principal Jacks¹ puts it: "The great troubles have not changed. Suffering and death, the agony of bereavement, the tragedies of blighted hopes and shipwrecked lives—these are not things peculiar to the twentieth century." People who babble about the problems which arise from modern science and modern criticism lose sight of the far more profound and enduring problems which are inherent in human nature and belong to the conditions of man's earthly lot. Dr. Denney used to say that there is really

¹ I borrow from his invigorating little volume on *Religious Perplexities*.

Think it Not Strange

only one religious difficulty—the difficulty of being religious. At any rate, we need not commiserate ourselves as though what pessimists call the present crisis in Christianity were something abnormal. “The only ages in the past when a crisis in religion did not exist were ages spiritually dead.” Nay, such a crisis supplies “the atmosphere where religion breathes most freely, the soil in which it strikes deepest root.” Only through much tribulation, of mind and soul as well as body, can we enter into the Kingdom of God. Because tribulation forms at once our ordeal and our opportunity. And surely, for disciples and companions of the Crucified, this ought not to seem strange.

When we consider them quietly, none of these things that have befallen us need stagger our faith. To a Christian no events that happen on earth ought to appear too strange to be true. Because they who are Christ's have tasted already the powers of

Think it Not Strange

the world to come, and they are to a certain extent acclimatized and at home among the *Magnalia Dei*. Christmas celebrates the advent of God's unspeakable gift—an arrival which meant nothing less than the coming of the unseen order into this. In the beginning it was but natural that the Divine visitation and redemption should take all men by surprise. For the Lord of glory, Who came to seek and to save the lost, personified the ancient promise, "His name shall be called Wonderful." The Gospels show us how Jesus Christ was a perpetual surprise to the people He met. Priests and scribes and peasants alike, they marvelled at Him, they wondered, they were shocked, they were beyond measure astonished. Because "He never said what people expected He was going to say, nor did what people thought He ought to do." Alike in Galilee and in Jerusalem He manifested Himself as Someone incalculable and unprecedented. His chosen friends

Think it Not Strange

marvelled at Him quite as much as did the casual bystanders. His pure soul seemed always aflame with Divine pity and Divine wrath. When He opened His lips He uttered wonderful sayings which drew men round Him like a vortex, terrible sayings which smote men and pierced them like a sword. And His mighty works corresponded to His mighty words. Nay, for such a Character it seems as if miracles were the appropriate atmosphere. In truth His Personality is the real portent. The supreme miracle is Christ Himself. Never man spake like this Man; never man loved and sorrowed and died and conquered like this Man. When we kneel before the mystery of His Cross and Passion we can only confess: *Marvellous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well.*

From the nature of the case, therefore, there is something in the Christian religion itself which is astonishing. The Gospel becomes the Gospel just because it discloses

Think it Not Strange

those abysses of judgment and mercy which correspond to the moral tragedy of the world. It provides us with a clue to the tormenting contradictions in human nature and human experience. It appears as the counterpart and answer to "those great and grave facts in which all men have a share, which make up our perplexity and our misery, and yet impel us to hope." Throughout the New Testament there runs one deep undertone of awe and amazement. Again and again an apostle seems to pause as he murmurs to himself, "O the depth!" And in the experience of humble-hearted Christians—the true penitents, the real saints—we hear the same note of perpetual surprise. The burning reality of God's love, the bitter cost of His redemption, the boundless freedom of His forgiveness, the inexpressible patience of His grace—these mysteries never lose their unearthly marvel. They are matters not for argument or logic, but for astonishment and humility and

Think it Not Strange

adoration. As our Christian experience ripens and matures, the wonder of it all deepens within our spirits. No horoscope can forecast what strange things may lie waiting for any one of us in the shadowy future. Yet of this we may be confident—that there are fresh miracles of God's mercy and faithfulness in store for each faithful soul. And when our mortal years are ended, to die will prove not so much an adventure or an agony, but a happy amazement. If ever our Lord lifted the veil which hides the life to come He did so when He uttered His parable of the Great Surprise. It was said of old by a wise Greek that men would meet many surprises after they were dead. On which a modern Christian teacher remarks that perhaps the chief surprise of all will be this—that while we were here we thought the ways of Almighty God so easy to argue about.

To primitive Christians, who were passing

Think it Not Strange

through the furnace of persecution, an apostle had boldness and courage to write: *Beloved, think it not strange.* His was no cheap or easy optimism; but he appealed to those who were Christ's, albeit in bitter suffering, and he bade them remember that to be a Christian means to be made one with Christ Himself. The mystical union between surrendered souls and their Redeemer involves a real fellowship of spirit with Love's redeeming sorrow. *Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing had happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings.* There is a sense in which His sufferings endure as long as time. As Pascal said, *Le Christ sera en agonie jusqu'à la fin du monde.* To-day, as our Lord looks upon the world for which He died, does He think it strange? To us, at least, He grants that as we hide ourselves in the Rock cleft for our sakes, we enter

Think it Not Strange

into God's awful, incommunicable secret, which is able to transmute human evil and anguish into a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Let us bring this spiritual truth to the test of a concrete illustration. Consider, for instance, the case of some man who has been struck down by accident and carried into hospital. To a shattered sufferer the hospital ward must needs seem a strange place, painfully unlike home. And while he lies brooding there, he finds his calamity impossible to explain. Why should this crushing blow have fallen upon him, and not upon some neighbour or kinsman or friend? "Why has God sent this bitter trial to me, of all people? Why does He appoint me to bear it? Why has it pleased the Lord to bruise me?" To dark, importunate questions like these—natural, inevitable, irrepressible questions—there is no complete or satisfying answer. The full explanation lies beyond our horizon and

Think it Not Strange

cannot be expressed in human thought and speech. But the New Testament reveals to us that all human suffering is bound up with the burden of the Divine Sufferer. In His wounds our agony takes refuge. Our self-denials lean against His Cross. Our mortal pangs belong to the immortal Passion of God. Words like these are feeble to shadow forth the mystery. Yet we can learn to endure patiently, bravely, peacefully, because Christ Himself is sharing all our earthly trouble and transforming it into heavenly joy at last. As you lie sleepless in the dark through lonely hours of pain, you become aware that there is One wearing a crown of thorns, Who is watching by your bed and gazing down on you with eyes of infinite tenderness and recognition. And you hear the whisper of His voice ;
“ *Beloved, think it not strange, this fiery trial, as though some strange thing had happened to thee. It is no strange thing to Me. Surely I have borne thy griefs and*

Think it Not Strange

carried thy sorrows. I was pierced for thy transgressions. I poured out my soul unto death for thy sake. *Beloved, think it not strange."*

VII

OUT OF A DRY GROUND

In Northern Rhodesia the traders and missionaries tell us how they suffer each year from long months of drought, which begins in March and lasts on till November. During the weeks after Michaelmas, however, before any rain has fallen, a strange miracle passes over the face of the thirsty land. Everywhere, without apparent cause, the sun-baked soil breaks out and blossoms into a wonderful wealth of flowers. By such resurrections nature still speaks to us in parables concerning the secrets of the grace of God.

In the age of our Lord's advent Israel was spiritually a parched and waterless ground. The ancient founts of inspiration had run dry. Pharisees and Sadducees and

Out of a Dry Ground

Herodians were so many sects of partisans, whose religion lay embalmed in formulas and confined in ritual. To Gentile critics it appeared that no good thing could come out of Palestine. Among Greeks and Romans alike the Jews had won an odious reputation. Tacitus, for example, in one well-known passage, refers to them as characterized by hatred of the human race and enmity against all the rest of the world. Their bigotry, their pride, their greed for gain made them detested along the Mediterranean shores. And yet out of the midst of this very people—so narrow, so fanatical, so bitterly exclusive—it came to pass that One arose Who broke through every barrier of race and caste and revealed the universal love of God wherein there is no respect of persons. Surely the most supernatural fact about Jesus Christ is the way in which He stands in spiritual contrast with His human heredity and His earthly environment. The New Jerusalem was no normal evolution

Out of a Dry Ground

from Old Jewry. In the fulness of time—which had become also the emptiness of time—the Eternal Word was made flesh : He grew up as a root out of a dry ground.

Religion, as a profound modern teacher has insisted, begins and proceeds and ends with the Given. Deliverance *ab extra* is the Christian watchword. Our Redeemer and Restorer is continually coming down from heaven and giving life to the world. Throughout the chequered history of the Church we meet with recurrences and repetitions of this Divine paradox which belonged to its miraculous birth. Again and again when Christian belief has sunk into superstition, when Christian morals have corrupted and decayed, suddenly, without visible cause or agency, new spiritual life appears and spreads and strengthens and multiplies we know not how. About every true revival there is something incalculable and unexplained. We can never predict the coming of a great Christian reformer.

Out of a Dry Ground

Catherine of Siena appears like an angel from heaven to rebuke Papal apostasy at Avignon. Whitefield and Wesley arise without warning to reanimate the dying religion of the English people. *The wind bloweth where it listeth ; thou canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth.* No man is able to forecast or anticipate those secret operations whereby the Holy Ghost quickeneth whom He will.

In the history of the world there are long, dreary centuries about which chroniclers find little to record. And in every age for multitudes of ordinary people life must needs seem dull and sordid and commonplace. They meet with hardly any thrilling adventures or golden hours of romance. Year after year they are constrained to toil on in mechanical fashion. Day unto day utters the same monotonous speech into their ears. More or less patiently they carry their appointed burdens and tramp along the familiar paths of routine. For

Out of a Dry Ground

the majority of men and women, existence means a tedious pilgrimage over dry and thirsty ground. There is only one discovery which has power to redeem it and transfigure it. But the revelation of the love of Christ is able to flood our dreary, weary experience with wonder and gladness and glory which are not of this world. By His grace He teaches the children of faith that pilgrim song which none but the redeemed can sing.

To-day we are often tempted to lose heart when we recognize the barrenness of so much religious machinery and controversy. On one side multitudes of Christians go on "mumbling the dry bones and munching the remainder biscuit" of tradition and ceremonial. On another side there is an extension of what Hutton used to call the "Hard Church." Crowds of good people are spending their strength in the effort to obtain Acts of Parliament against evil, they are invoking more inspectors and more policemen to reform the world. The late

Out of a Dry Ground

Principal Denney was himself a clear-sighted and ardent social reformer, yet he wrote: "I feel very distrustful of the organized action of the Churches to promote legislation even for Christian ends, or ends which can be represented as Christian. . . . The multiplication of laws and the deterioration of character to a large extent keep pace with each other." Our human laws exist to deal with crimes, not with sins. Many sins—including some of the deadliest, like avarice and pride—are not crimes at all. The arm of flesh can restrain criminals, but it is powerless to save sinners. Yet Christians know how God trusts to sheer love, and love alone, to redeem the souls whom He has left at liberty to disown and defy Him. And therefore Christians can never pin their faith to human prohibitions and suppressions as instruments for regenerating mankind. According to the New Testament, force can never put away sin; we have to look elsewhere to find the cure. As Richard

Out of a Dry Ground

Baxter used to say: "It is because we have so few high saints that we have so many low sinners." Our passionate hope and prayer must be that God in His mercy will remember and visit His Church in this wilderness, so that even amid its present drought and aridity of spirit fresh saints and apostles may once more be born.

The same truth is illustrated also in the individual life of the believer. Now and again the most zealous and loyal workers for Christ wake up to discover that their pathway of service has become gradually macadamized into a mere custom of doing good. Moreover, when we listen to the holiest Christians who explore God's treasury of grace, they testify with one voice that they have had to endure seasons when their souls grew parched, hard, and flowerless as the desert sand; when they felt devoid of capacity, even of desire, for communion with their Lord. In one of his sermons on Canticles St. Bernard makes this confession :

Out of a Dry Ground

“ Oftentimes, in the early days of my conversion, my heart was dried up and withered within me ” ; it was frozen, and the spring tarried long ; “ my soul slept in weariness, sad almost to despair, and murmuring to itself, *Who shall stand before the face of His cold ?* ” These arid experiences are often akin to what so many mystics have described as the “ obscure night ” of the soul. Against such visitations of inward drought and deadness we possess no antidote in ourselves. We can only look beyond ourselves and fasten our eyes on the sign of the Son of Man. Here is the witness of one who had been deeply exercised and instructed in the mysteries of faith : “ The Cross has become to me in spiritual things just what the felt, experienced affection of a steadfast friend becomes in natural life, a settled axiom of the soul—an already proven certainty which I rest in, without needing consciously to realize. And to the work of Christ upon the Cross I can commit

Out of a Dry Ground

and commend my whole spiritual destinies, and say, Let their weight hang there with Him, even in those frequent seasons of deadness when His very sufferings and death do not powerfully affect my feelings. Life itself will sometimes appear strangely false, dream-like, and unreal ; but the fact of Christ's death remains valid. It is true for me, inalienably true, though the poverty of my human nature forbids me either to rejoice in it or to weep over it as I would. Even sorrow is a fruit which it requires some richness of soil to raise and ripen. But the Cross and faith in the work wrought there is a root that can grow out of a dry ground."

VIII

LOVE'S CONSTRAINT

We have all seen a mariner's compass. Perhaps we have been at sea in a storm, and have stood by the ship's binnacle and watched that little steel bar, delicately poised on its bearings, oscillate and flicker and shiver, still all the time pointing north and south. It is the most stable thing on board the heaving, tossing vessel. Because the compass-needle is in the grasp of a higher power—a subtle, unseen force which vibrates round the world, and ripples from star to star in the corners of creation, and thrills through the substance of that tiny bar of steel. If the compass-needle could speak, it might say, "The force of magnetism constraineth me." Even so, St. Paul knows himself to be in the grip of a

Love's Constraint

higher power—

L'amor che muove il sole e l'altre stelle.

His inmost being is thrilled and penetrated and possessed and controlled by the love of Christ. The apostle has done with unchartered freedom. He has accepted that yoke which is easy, because it delivers us from our own wilfulness. He has yielded to the overruling of His Lord and Master. He is conquered and made captive by the King of Love.

Consider how the apostle describes this strange compulsion which has mastered his life. Love is something which we can never properly analyse or define. The people who know most about it—the tenderest women, the deepest-hearted men—are least able to say in precise words how much love means. Yet everybody knows something about it. For love is one of those elemental things—like sunshine and mother's milk and daily bread and death and immortality—which belong to us all.

Love's Constraint

Now Christianity is built on this overwhelming paradox—that God Himself is nothing less than pure and perfect love, that the Creator cares passionately for each single soul which He has made. It is hard to believe: perhaps because it is almost dreadful to believe. Nothing smites selfish men with such awe as the truth that God Almighty loves them, and always has loved them, and always will. But the New Testament never deals with love as a mere abstraction. There in the Gospel we see how God's love was made flesh and dwelt among us, and became a Man with men, and bore our griefs and carried our sorrows and cancelled our curse and put away our sin by the sacrifice of Himself. The Gospel shows us Divine Love, pierced and wounded and bleeding, and yet victorious—rejoicing with unutterable joy to pour itself out for us men and for our salvation.

The love of God does not mean God's good-nature. It means the consuming

Love's Constraint

passion of His heart. It means what the Bible is not afraid to call God's jealousy—His Divine hunger and thirst for His children to love Him in return. We miss our way in the New Testament until we realize the terrible intensity of the love of Christ. He lived continually at a white heat of affection. His blood was always aflame with pity and wrath. His burning words have little meaning until we realize that they broke out of a soul on fire.

And what was it about Jesus Christ which kindled His disciples into flame as well? Was it not the union in one Person of supreme power and glory with utter self-forgetfulness? The unsearchable riches which He renounced, side by side with the unsearchable poverty and agony which He embraced, the nameless humiliation of such a life and death, this measureless sacrifice for the sake of selfish, sinful men—here is the content and quality of the love of Christ,

Love's Constraint

which fills it with such virtue to constrain
and to subdue.

Not in soft speech is told the earthly story,
Love of all loves ! that showed Thee for an hour ;
Shame was Thy kingdom, and reproach Thy glory,
Death Thine eternity, the Cross Thy power.

Ah with what bitter triumph had I seen them,
Drops of redemption bleeding from Thy brow !
Thieves, and a culprit crucified between them,
All men forsaking Him,—and that was Thou !

He loved me : He gave Himself for me.
There was no goodness in me to invite Him.
There was no gratitude in me to requite
Him. But He set His heart upon me. By
one long act of His own will, through
anguish of body and soul such as cannot be
imagined, He gave Himself for me.

All through the New Testament one fact is
beyond dispute : those primitive disciples
felt that Christ had laid them under
infinite and endless obligation. He had
done for them what they could never
do for themselves, what all their devotion
could never repay. This sense of an

Love's Constraint

incalculable debt breaks out in impassioned language as often as they face the perpetual question, "How much owest thou unto thy Lord?" And the history of the Church proves how in all generations the most genuine Christians have realized this love of Christ most vividly, have yielded themselves to it most absolutely and unreservedly. Through every age we recognize them by this token. In the great Communion of saints they speak many dialects, but they all share one common secret of experience. They are all dominated by the same overwhelming motive. Here is the catholic confession of the faithful.

For the sake of this love, kings and queens have laid aside their crowns and bared their feet and gone off after Jesus Christ. And little children still yield to the sweet attraction which draws them into His everlasting Arms. And strong men in their pride are still bowed and melted by this mightiest force on earth or in heaven.

Love's Constraint

What lifts Magdalene from the mire of her defilement, and transforms Augustine the sensualist into a saint, and lures Francis to take poverty for a bride? The love of Christ constrains them. What nerves Luther to defy wickedness in high places? What launches the Pilgrim Fathers on their strange venture across the sea? The love of Christ constrains them. What leads John Howard down into half the dungeons of Europe? What carries David Livingstone across the swamps and forests of Africa? The love of Christ constrains them. Yes, and the same spell is still working, for its charm never wears out. Each missionary and martyr enshrined in the Church's memory, each humble patient cross-bearer whom everyone but God forgets, and the sisters of mercy and Salvation lasses down among grimy back-streets, and the Sunday-school teachers gathering their children round them in village class-rooms—they all witness the same confession and

Love's Constraint

tell the same tale. They know what makes them the folk they are. The love of Christ constrains them all.

The Christian Church is a band of men and women whose hearts God has touched, who are magnetized by this Love which is above every love. Here is the magic which draws Christians together, and binds them into fellowship, and sends them out on common service, and makes them eager to spend themselves for Christ's little ones and Christ's poor. Nothing else matters but this. There is no other motive except this mighty constraint which can keep the Church worthy of its name. Apart from the love of Christ, His Church vanishes like a fairy city, and you find only hollow forms and empty sacraments and lifeless prayers.

It is one hall-mark of greatness to be dominated by a single ruling passion. We recognize that hall-mark on the lives of outstanding men of genius—the poets and prophets and captains of mankind. We

Love's Constraint

may say, for instance, that the love of nature constrained Wordsworth, the love of Italy constrained Mazzini, the love of science constrained Darwin. But in this chequered world common men and women obey various conflicting emotions, and so their lives are swayed along many devious paths for weal or woe. The strangers whom we jostle in the streets, if they told the truth, would confess that they are governed by strangely different impulses. They would say: "The hunger for food constraineth me"; or "The routine of custom constraineth me"; or "The fear of being found out constraineth me"; or "The craving for excitement constraineth me"; or "The hope of reputation and applause constraineth me." Some of us who call ourselves by the Holy Name, if we were to utter what lies in our hearts, would have to admit that we are impelled by mingled motives, not in themselves base or shameful yet still falling below the noblest of all.

Love's Constraint

One man would say, "The opinion of friends constraineth me"; another would say, "The sense of duty constraineth me"; another would say, "The tenderness of home constraineth me." Direct, personal devotion to Christ, as it was felt by His first followers, is become a rare thing among modern Christians. "The prevalent feeling towards Him now among religious men is an awful fear of His supernatural greatness, and a disposition to obey His commands arising partly from dread of future punishment and hope of future reward, and partly from a nobler feeling of loyalty, which, however, is inspired by His office rather than His person." How much of our religion remains poor and sickly and barren, it sinks into a formal service, it hardens with a legal bondage, because we dare not say in sincerity, "The love of Christ constraineth me." That single sentence could turn the water of our experience into wine.

Love's Constraint

How miserably we misrepresent the Gospel! We let men think of the Christian life as though it were a painful restraint—one long renouncement of things natural, one long denial of things pleasant—a pallid, scrupulous existence, robbed of those high passions and heroic joys which make life worth living. But the key-note of the Christian life is love: and love is the inward secret of liberty and energy and rapture. Love means not your hands in fetters but your heart on fire. *Ama, et fac quod vis*, exclaimed Augustine: "Love, and do what thou wilt." Because this sacred master-passion acts as an inner principle of consistency and freedom. It gives unity and dignity to your existence. It makes you proud to submit, and eager to obey. Your whole being henceforth revolves naturally round its true centre—which is self no longer, but the Lord and Lover of your soul.

The final question which Jesus Christ

Love's Constraint

puts to every separate sinner is the question He put to that disciple who had denied Him in the hour of His most bitter need, denied Him with oaths and curses. He asks each man of us, " Lovest thou Me ? " He does not say, " Understandest thou Me ? ", but only " Lovest thou Me ? " He makes all else hinge upon this. In His eyes the one thing needful is that we should be bound by passionate personal attachment to Himself. The Son of God reduces religion and morality to their simplest terms. He Himself is the supreme test and touchstone of human character. In His judgment nothing else seriously matters but this. " Lovest thou Me ? "—will there be any other challenge for us to answer at the last assize ?

In this experience lies the root of the whole matter, the very genius of the Gospel. A Christian means one who has fallen in love with Christ Himself. The best Christian is he who has the deepest and purest

Love's Constraint

and truest and most ardent love for Christ. And, from the beginning until now, multitudes of plain men and women have found it possible to conceive for their Redeemer a devotion closer than words can describe, a personal affection and veneration so absorbing that they have confessed, "I live no more, but Christ lives in me." Day by day they look up wistfully for His smile, they shrink like children from His tenderest reproach. For their greatest grief would be to grieve Him; and their chief desire is that, whether by their living or their dying, Christ shall be well pleased.

There is one other sense of the word "constrain" which illuminates this subject. Often we call a man "constrained" when he appears reserved and shy and tongue-tied, when he sits silent and does not join freely in conversation. In this sense also the love of Christ constrains us. Because it is too wonderful for words, it is too sacred to talk about glibly, it can never be explained

Love's Constraint

in language or expressed in common speech. When we come to the end of all our sermons and arguments, we must needs stop and say, "Behold, I show you a mystery." The love of Christ which passeth knowledge passeth utterance as well. It is not a matter for reasoning or rhetoric: it is a mystery for tears.

IX

BORN IN A BARN

Year by year Christmas repeats the same sermon, and its text is the unsearchable poverty of Christ. No feature of our Lord's advent has such power to move men's hearts as the fact that, though He was rich, for our sakes He became literally poor. When the Eternal Word was made flesh and dwelt among us He chose a hard lot, so that He might be at home with the humblest of His brothers and sisters. By this Divine object-lesson He showed the world that there is no respect of persons with God. Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part in the same. The Son of Man was born in a barn, with only a mother's love to welcome Him. Christmas

Born in a Barn

carries us back to the naked truth that each nameless baby born in a workhouse is just as dear to Almighty God as any little prince wrapped in purple and fine linen under a palace roof. The earthly life of Jesus Christ corresponded to the hardship and humiliation of His nativity. He was brought up in a cottage. He wore the garments of a workman. He laboured with His own hands. By the sweat of His brow He earned His bread. He understood what it means to be hungry and thirsty and weary and of no account. He bore on His own heart the burden of the downtrodden and the disinherited. His compassion always went out to the bottom dog. He descended into the moral underworld, that among the outcasts and paupers He might give His mercy away. Silver and gold He had none to give. He laid up treasure nowhere but in heaven. When He came to the evening of His mortal day He was stripped of possessions. He died penniless, and borrowed a

Born in a Barn

grave for His burial at last. These outward circumstances which surround the Incarnation are like trumpets of thunder to proclaim what price God puts upon our human distinctions. Rank and wealth and luxury and learning—all the accidental things which set men apart from one another—go for nothing in the eyes of Christ. They matter not a whit; they make no real difference; they shrivel and vanish away, compared with our common inheritance in God's everlasting love.

Christmas speaks to us with many voices, and none of them is without signification. But assuredly it lays an axe at the root of two deadly sins. It utterly condemns the wickedness of class pride and the converse wickedness of class hatred. And both these sins grow rank in English soil and are bearing bitter fruit under English skies to-day. No state of soul is more anti-Christian than arrogance—the attitude of the superior person. Because arrogance

Born in a Barn

contradicts the whole spirit of the Gospel. Christ always looked upon a man's "possessions"—his position and property and cleverness and reputation—as mere accidents, of no special account. It never crossed our Lord's mind that being rich or being poor had anything to do with a man's real value. Because in every human creature He discerned a being unspeakably precious and lovable, the object of God's boundless love and sacrifice. The most levelling of all facts, the only secure basis for democracy, is this tremendous fact that God loves all men alike, that He always has loved them, and that He always will. And, therefore, Christ could not tolerate people who plumed themselves on their own superiority and despised others. They marched about filled with self-importance, proudly conscious of their social status, their ecclesiastical prestige, their orthodox attainment, their moral correctness. But He withered them with words of flame: "Ye are they

Born in a Barn

which justify yourselves before men : that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."

Among modern Christians the spirit of the Pharisee lurks under manifold disguises. How easy it is for us even in church to stiffen with the sense of religious propriety and respectability, to feel genteel in the cushioned pews we hire. How apt we are to look down upon those coarse, ungodly outsiders who tramp past our church doors. The Epistle of James shows that a primitive Christian assembly could even then be dominated by snobs. It is our snobbishness to-day which, more than any other single cause, repels common folk from public worship. But every snob is literally denying Christ. Dr. Pusey confessed that he never passed a workman in the street without a secret feeling of reverence, as he said to himself " Is not this the Carpenter ? " The temptation to class pride besets us and entangles us at every turn.

Born in a Barn

People in comfortable houses consider themselves above the people who have to crowd in tenements. The children of the retail shop-keeper may not go to school with the children of the wholesale dealer who supplies goods to that very shop. How difficult it is for a Christian woman in her motor-car to visit another woman who keeps no servant, and to do it without the slightest taint of condescension! To be purse-proud may be more vulgar, but it is not a bit more wicked than to be puffed up with the sense of our education, our refinement, our culture, our name and place in the world. Many people question this or that article of the Christian creed, but the doctrine which they secretly revolt against is St. Paul's terrible doctrine that "there is no difference." And yet every cradle preaches the same doctrine, and every coffin as well—God's humbling, heart-searching truth which the angels of Bethlehem affirm afresh on Christmas Day.

Born in a Barn

Side by side with the evil of class arrogance stands the evil of class hatred. This latter sin is commonly associated with certain theories about work and wealth. Hitherto, our civilization—such as it is—has been built up upon the basis of private property and individual enterprise. To-day, however, multitudes are declaring that all wealth ought to belong to the community of labourers who have produced it, that competition should be abolished and every business be carried on by the State. Now whether this economic gospel be true or false, it can easily be preached so as to rouse acute antagonism between the people who fear that they have much to lose by its acceptance and the people who hope that they have much to gain. It is obvious, indeed, that the main moral postulates of Socialism are deductions from Christian axioms. The Gospel declares that all men are “one man” in Christ, sons of God and brethren. We are members one of another,

Born in a Barn

and as we live by others we can find no rest until we live for others. These are fundamental Christian ideas. Nevertheless, the Gospel *per se* does not instruct us whether this or that social system will work out in the way we may expect or desire. Christianity, for example, teaches us to pay our debts ; but it does not tell us whether our bills are added up correctly. Christianity teaches us the brotherhood of man ; but it does not tell us whether the brotherhood of man will best be promoted in practice by nationalizing all the instruments of production. That problem is one whose very terms can hardly be grasped without some amount of economic training and experience ; certainly it is a problem on which the most unselfish saints may hold quite opposite opinions.

All Christians, however, no matter what economic theories they adopt, must at least agree that the doctrine of class hatred is born of the devil. And to-day we stand

Born in a Barn

face to face with this malignant spirit, which the wiser Socialist leaders dread and vehemently denounce. It is worse, because it is more widespread, than the rancour between priests and heretics. It is more deadly, because it is more contagious, than the antipathy between negroes and whites. Class hatred can poison fellowship even in a country village, when it fills people's hearts with gall and wormwood instead of charity. The kingdom of peace on earth will never be founded upon furious ill-will and bitterness among men.

For these base human passions there is no antidote except the perfect and eternal good-will of God. How can anyone feel real affection for his rivals, his competitors, his oppressors, if there be no King of Love Who cares for us all alike? If Christ had not made us feel that every man is sacred, who would suppose most men to be anything but objectionable or ridiculous? If there be nothing but evolution-ethics to go by

Born in a Barn

why must I sacrifice myself for my neighbour? *What's Hecuba to me?* There is no sufficient answer which does not confess that I am bound to my neighbour in that higher nexus which unites each of us to God's Incarnate love. The only ground for human brotherhood is that which was made manifest on Christmas Day. And we praise the Lord of Glory most of all for this—that He conquers our pride by His own humiliation, and heals our strife by His own sacrifice, and casts out our greed for gain by His own unsearchable poverty.

X

THE SUPREMACY OF LOVE

The time is gone by when it was fashionable to sneer at St. Paul as an inferior writer, lacking in power and charm. Our foremost Greek scholars have escaped from the trammels of conventional tradition, and they recognize the apostle as a classic of Hellenism, who exemplifies the sincerity and originality and vitality which belong to great literature. Reading his Epistles, "now at last, at last, one can hear in Greek the utterance of an inner experience, fresh and living." And students of the New Testament agree that St. Paul reached his high-water mark in that "Hymn to Heavenly Love" which he sent to the Church at Corinth. Critics who refuse to call them-

The Supremacy of Love

selves Christian pay homage to its sublime eloquence. Yet such tributes somehow seem to detract from the wonder and glory of that amazing chapter. Nowhere else does the apostle approach so closely to the absolute values of the Sermon on the Mount. To him, love represents the supreme fact and the controlling doctrine of the Gospel. For God is not faith, God is not hope, but God is love.

All Christians admit this truth of the supremacy of love. Yet how few of us embrace it in our hearts and translate it into our daily practice. Compared with love, St. Paul declares that nothing else seriously matters. Weighed in the balance against love, he reckons religious knowledge, pulpit eloquence, almsgiving, nay, martyrdom itself, to be of no account. To St. Paul, as to St. John, love alone is the essence of God's nature, and therefore the fulfilling of man's destiny. Here is the vital characteristic of the Gospel. And herein lies the

The Supremacy of Love

crucial test for the Church as a whole and for each separate believer. When theologians dispute about the doctrines of faith and the understanding of mysteries, when ecclesiastics wrangle over orders and sacraments and ritual, let us never forget that all such things as these are void and worthless apart from love. When we try to draw up a list of persons whom we class as eminent modern Christians, worthy of the chief seats in our synagogues and the uppermost rooms at our feasts, do we confine ourselves to learned divines, powerful preachers, astute and influential leaders, generous dispensers of money? If we believe St. Paul, the one essential and commanding quality in a Christian is sheer and simple affection—a heart that goes out in passionate tenderness towards all sorts and conditions of men. Those sins which our Lord Himself brands as blackest in His sight are all sins against love—sins like bitterness, arrogance, avarice, despising His little ones, neglecting His

The Supremacy of Love

sufferers. Salvation means to be redeemed from self-seeking and self-regard.

Our life, with all it yields of joy and woe,
And hope and fear,
Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love—
How love might be, hath been indeed, and is.

This grace, which is the specific genius of Christianity, can hardly be analysed in the abstract: we venture to illustrate it by one or two human examples. Charles Lamb counselled his readers to "get the writings of John Woolman by heart." Here is a passage from the Journal of that New Jersey Quaker, written about 1740, when he was quite a young man: "I looked upon the works of God in His visible creation and an awfulness covered me; my heart was tender and often contrite, and universal love to my fellow-creatures increased in me: this will be understood by such who have trodden in the same path." He describes further how in the closing months of his life he crossed the ocean to

The Supremacy of Love

London in a small sailing vessel. From scruples of conscience he would not accept the cabin comforts which his friends offered him, but endured five weeks in the steerage instead. All through the voyage the Journal reveals how his whole soul was brimming over with affection and compassion for the rough sailors among whom he lived, how tenderly and pitifully he entered into their hardships and their temptations. On that Atlantic passage assuredly they had Love on board as a messmate in the person of John Woolman.

Another illustration we borrow from a singularly beautiful little book entitled *Cecilia de Noël*. The story pictures a woman who was tenderness incarnate, and yet withal so natural that she reminds us of the dictum that real saints appear to be not good but merely charming. "The transparent gaze that Cecilia de Noël turned upon her fellows beamed love poured forth without stint and without condition. It was as if every man,

The Supremacy of Love

woman and child who approached her became instantly to her more interesting than herself, their defects more tolerable, their wants more imperative, their sorrows more moving than her own." One friend speaks of her as follows: "Ever since I have known Cecilia, I have always felt that if all the world failed this would be left. If the very worst happened to me, if I was ill of some loathsome disease from which everybody shrank away, or if my mind was unhinged and I was tempted with horrible temptations, I would go to Cecilia. She would not turn from me; she would run to meet me as the father in the parable did, not because I was her friend but because I was in trouble. All who are in trouble are Cecilia's friends, and she feels for them just as other people feel towards their own children. And I could tell her everything, show her everything—Cecilia's pity is so reverent, so pure. No suffering could ever be disgusting to Cecilia, nor ridiculous, nor

The Supremacy of Love

grotesque. The more humiliating it was the more pitiful it would be to her. Anything that suffers is sacred to Cecilia. She would comfort, as if she went on her knees to one." In another passage Cecilia de Noël herself discloses the hidden spirit which possessed her : it is, she says, " as if one's heart were beating and overflowing with love towards everything in this world and in all the worlds ; as if the very grasses and stones were dear, but dearest of all the creatures that still suffer, so that to wipe away their tears for ever one feels that one would die—oh, so gladly. And always as if this were something not our own, but part of that wonderful great Love above us, about us, everywhere, clasping us so tenderly and so safely." In such souls as hers the flame of sacred love has been kindled by Him Who is the Source of this celestial fire on human altars.

Dare we believe in the supremacy of love—with all its tremendous implications ?

The Supremacy of Love

St. Paul's great hymn to charity which never faileth must be true concerning the charity of God. The Kingdom of God must mean the dominion of Omnipotent Love, and nothing less. Men have sometimes argued about the glory of God, as though the Creator were concerned to obtain due deference and homage from His creatures. But the glory of God Almighty—that which makes God glorious—is in the face of Jesus Christ. It is His pure and perfect majesty to be utterly self-forgetful. God rejoices with infinite joy to pour Himself out for the sake of His children. God exists from eternity to eternity by giving Himself away.

How can the Church proclaim this overwhelming mystery of the Gospel? Not by wisdom of words, but by exhibiting something of the same Divine passion actually incarnate in human characters and lives. For there is a compelling and convincing beauty about such lives, like that which belongs to great works of art; so that to

The Supremacy of Love

see them is to believe what they believe, to do homage to the supremacy of that love which they daily express. The Church can convert the world to its ideal only by confronting the world with the actual thing—the humble, self-forgetful, persistent passion for all souls which flows from Christ's own pierced Heart. When once this supernatural love which dwells visibly in some rare Christians becomes general in the Christian society, there may be no longer much need for books about the evidences of faith. The witness of a living Church grows irresistible as soon as that Church can say, *Henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the stigmata of Jesus.*

XI

RESPECT OF PERSONS

In primitive society, as indeed in every age of civilization, one vital problem is to secure justice between man and man. Moreover ancient law depended, more even than modern law depends, upon upright administrators. So the Old Testament insists again and again that a Hebrew judge must do his duty without fear or favour; he must deal impartially and incorruptibly alike with peasants and nobles, with the poor and the rich. This duty is enforced by solemn sanctions. According to the Bible, an earthly judge exercises authority as representing the Supreme Justice, "the God of gods who regardeth not persons." There is no inequity with the Lord, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.

Respect of Persons

The commandments laid upon Israel were rooted and grounded in the righteous nature of the Most High. It is true, indeed, as Goldwin Smith wrote, that "the Hebrew did not understand, nor, without a miracle which would have made the shadow go down two thousand years on the sundial of history, could he have understood the brotherhood of man, much less that higher brotherhood by which all men are united in Christ." In the New Testament there is unfolded to us how much the Incarnation of the Son of God implies and entails. Christ came into a world where men were blinded with the pride of race and estranged by its bitter prejudices. But His Gospel proclaims one common salvation for Jew and Gentile. All mankind have been loved with the same Love, and redeemed by the same Sacrifice. There is no respect of nations with God. Moreover, Christ came into a world whose social fabric was founded and built up upon slavery. But the Gospel

Respect of Persons

declares to masters and bondsmen alike that they all have the same Judge in heaven. Before His awful tribunal human distinctions shrivel up and vanish away. There is no respect of persons with Him.

Among Christians in England to-day few will challenge these elemental truths. We take democracy for granted, without always understanding that "there is no basis for democracy except in a dogma about the divine origin of man"; and we pay lip-service at least to equality and fraternity. Our difficulties begin when we try to work out these principles in detail and to apply them to practical affairs. The very word "respect" still carries a certain weight of obligation. Every serious man admits that he is bound to show respect for age and experience, for learning and intellectual distinction, for long public service, for official rank and responsibility in a democratic State. A great captain of industry deserves not less deference than the general

Respect of Persons

of a brigade. We recognize that even the most popular form of government demands subordination and discipline and obedience to authority—just as it would be fatal to dispense with them on board an ocean steamer. To this extent we all confess that the powers that be are ordained of God. Nevertheless, in the ordinary conduct of life, people are constantly making false distinctions between persons. We render honour where honour is not due, because we confuse the substance with the accidents. We allow ourselves to be impressed by what is not properly impressive. We mistake the surface appearance for the inward reality. We pay homage to the mask, instead of to the man.

Consider, for instance, the abject worship of success. What is more common—yet what is less Christian? How many of our Lord's apostles appeared to succeed in this life? And certainly in the present age of competition and self-advertisement those

Respect of Persons

are not the noblest qualities which make a man outwardly and conspicuously successful. Yet we crown the popular author who can command a huge circulation ; we run after the popular orator who can always draw a crowd.

Consider, again, the pursuit of what is called social success. In English society the old exclusive barriers have broken down and disappeared. The aristocratic caste which once depended upon birth has flung open its gates and widened its borders. Yet we still see multitudes of people who spend themselves in striving and scheming and grovelling to gain admission into the circle just above them. These "climbers," to use an expressive name, are obsequious to any person whatever who they hope may help them to climb. Theirs is the precise spirit of the snob ; for, as Thackeray said, it is the nature of a snob "meanly to admire mean things." The New Testament describes this attitude of mind as "holding men's persons in admira-

Respect of Persons

tion for the sake of advantage." More vulgar still is the deference which people show to a rich man, however he may have gained his money. Ninety years ago De Tocqueville pointed out in his famous book on America that a democratic community is dangerously tempted to overvalue material wealth. Has the United States escaped this deadly temptation to measure life by the gold standard? Dare we say that, either before or since the War, we ourselves have conquered it? To most English people money appears to be one chief tangible proof and token of success. Yet one of our own prophets warns us that those who worship success of this kind are foredoomed to become slaves and cowards.

The spirit of the age too often contrives to infect the Church. Even sincere Christian men and women are not proof against tendencies and temptations such as these. We do homage, for instance, to a minister

Respect of Persons

because he has the gift of popular speech, and we practically take that as the criterion of spiritual efficiency. In our synagogues we find it hard to recognize a saint in the gallery, who wears shabby garments and talks with a Galilean accent ; but we reserve chief seats for people who drive up in motor-cars. And we habitually allow religious institutions and societies to be controlled by men whose main qualification is that they give money. Some munificent millionaire, like Rockefeller or Carnegie, might bias the policy of half our missionary and philanthropic enterprises, if he cared to pay for the privilege. This unholy respect of persons is possible to us, because we have not yet learned to look at earthly things as they appear before the pure and awful gaze of Jesus Christ, we have not faith to measure them by His standard nor to appraise them according to His reckoning. Yet how much that is highly esteemed among men, even among pious Christians, withers away when

Respect of Persons

it comes under His eyes which are as a flame of fire ?

Surely it must be one chief aim of Christian worship that we should bow our souls in utter humility before the very presence of Christ Himself—that we may learn of Him to love what He loves, and to value what He values, and to despise what He despises and condemns. Our Lord has blotted out respect of persons once for all, *nailing it to His cross*. Nothing but the steady recollection of this Divine judgment can keep a Christian minister faithful in his hard and sacred vocation. Nothing else will save him from secret cowardice and time-serving, or deliver him from the temptation to flatter average respectability and to excuse popular sins. But a preacher of the everlasting Gospel dare not tolerate partiality in his message. He must hold up the same spiritual standard for high and low, the same for workmen as for capitalists. He must not pander to a mob any more than

Respect of Persons

to a millionaire. Because he discerns that among all alike there is no difference in regard to the things which matter most, the only things which seriously matter in the end. The power of the pulpit does not depend ultimately upon eloquence or learning. But whenever a Christian preacher really moves human souls, it is because his critics have to confess about him, as they confessed about his Master: *We know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man, for thou regardest not the person of men.*

XII

THE FATHER WHO SEETH IN SECRET

These last fifty years have witnessed a remarkable breaking-down of reserve. Somehow or other people have got rid of the old homely instinct for privacy and reticence. They like to live and to talk in public, they are fond of taking meals at restaurants and spending holidays at hotels. Numbers of persons who have no other title to distinction find themselves in print. There are papers that report their movements and describe their habits and make their features common property. And most of them enjoy and encourage this glare of advertisement. Not merely politicians and authors and actresses, but even some ecclesiastics to-day appear to keep a personal press bureau.

The Father Who seeth in Secret

Now, quite apart from the question of vulgarity, there follows one unmistakable result. To live in this fashion under a multitude of eyes becomes unwholesome and demoralizing. It fosters whatever is superficial and showy and morbid and insincere. It ministers to conceit and vainglory. It feeds the evil appetite "to be seen of men." When a Christian has courage to undertake a career of public duty, with all its distractions and pitfalls, he quickly discovers how often he is driven to take refuge in the secret place of the Most High. How can he endure that glare which beats upon a pulpit or a platform, unless he has learnt to abide under the shadow of the Almighty? To men so circumstanced, our Lord's warning strikes home: *Thou, when thou prayest, shut thy door and pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*

Nothing is hidden from the eyes of

The Father Who seeth in Secret

Eternal Love. God gazes into the depths of our being, and He goes on loving us miraculously in spite of all He finds there. By virtue of this pure and perfect affection He understands us utterly and altogether. It is strange—sometimes it is terrible—that, try as we may, we can never properly understand one another. A French critic of this country once declared that every Englishman is not only an islander but is himself an island, cut off from his fellows by estranging barriers. Yet barriers like these belong to the very framework of human nature. Each separate person remains a mystery to his closest friends. They have no skill to read his thoughts, to scrutinize his true motives, to explore the hidden springs of his soul. “Every man knows that his own heart is a sanctuary which others cannot enter—a holy ground where others may not tread even with naked feet.” The sense of this spiritual isolation may become

The Father Who seeth in Secret

our misery and torment. Often we are conscious that other people judge us unjustly and suspect us wrongfully just because they fail to understand us, and it is hopeless to try to make our real meaning and motive plain. From earthly censors and scorers we turn for refuge to the presence of the Father Who seeth in secret. With infinite relief we pour out our complaint before Him, and cry *O Lord, Thou knowest*. Though all men mistake us and condemn us, surely our judgment is with our God. He shall keep us secretly in His pavilion from the strife of tongues.

Christ Himself left us the great example of secrecy and solitude in devotion. Not once nor twice He went up into a mountain, or departed into a solitary place, so that He might be more alone in prayer. Even in Gethsemane He withdrew about a stone's-cast from those disciples whom He had chosen to watch with Him through His agony. Public worship and common prayer

The Father Who seeth in Secret

have their own beatitudes ; but we do not deserve to be called Christians unless we shut out all the world and enter into communion with our Father alone and apart. And when we ponder Christ's own profound and mysterious words concerning prayer, we begin to realize the austere strength of spiritual privacy and reserve. Face to face with our Father in secret, we gain confidence to speak freely, just because there is no human being to overhear. Our sins lie naked and open to God, but to no one else but God. Before His pure eyes we can endure to bare our souls, but before His eyes alone. There are some dark confessions which would become profane and intolerable if we made them to any fellow-creature. Here is one chief evil of the confessional : it discloses to a man of like passions with ourselves things which no fallen man ought to be told. The penitent is degraded by that self-betrayal. Whereas he gains not only forgiveness but strength for recovery and

The Father Who seeth in Secret

retrieval from the fact that his real self—the very worst about him, as well as the very best—is a secret reserved for God only.

Some devout persons are fond of talking glibly about the inmost experiences of their souls. For instance, they will describe to you in great detail how wonderfully God has answered their petitions. Yet when we prove for ourselves what it means to pray in spirit and in truth, to pray as Christ Himself taught us, to pray sometimes not without strong crying and tears, we begin to understand also that, from the nature of the case, the Divinest part of the answer to such a prayer must be something intensely and sacredly personal, and therefore incommunicable. The Father Who heareth in secret answereth also in secret, and no man knoweth that answer saving he to whom it is given.

We have said that living in public often ministers painfully to personal conceit. To be photographed and paragraphed and adver-

The Father Who seeth in Secret

tised in order to be "seen of men" becomes a nursery of egotism and vainglory. On the other hand, there is no school for inward humility except the practice of the presence of the Father Who seeth in secret. To live in constant recollection of His scrutiny, to know ourselves continually arraigned before His holy and awful love—this quenches the dazzle of many things which attract other men. It makes time-serving and unreality impossible for us. It constrains us to be unworldly and single-hearted and sincere. Above all, this sacred solitude with God will keep us truly humble, in Christ's sense of that word. Now to be poor in spirit (as a wise schoolmaster has said) is the element of human character that is distinctively Christian—"an undivulged discontent with ourselves, an uncommunicated sense of failure, a reticent self-indictment, an unrevealed self-abasement." God's holiest saints never cease their prayer for pardoning mercy. When

The Father Who seeth in Secret

they have shut to the door, they whisper to the Father Who seeth in secret: "Behold, we are unprofitable servants: we are not worthy to be called Thy sons."

XIII

NOT DISOBEDIENT

St. Paul had one supreme date in his calendar. He referred everything back to that transcendent hour when, to use his own words, "it pleased God to reveal His Son in me." Suddenly there flashed upon his spirit the glory of Jesus Christ. The eternal Voice came pealing into his conscience, the awful Presence flooded his soul, and he recognized with unspeakable certainty his despised, rejected, persecuted King. The Pharisee fell prone to earth, blinded by the heavenly vision which transformed him into an apostle. But his fall was for the rising of many in Israel, and his darkness was a light to lighten the Gentiles. It is true, indeed, that the New Testament represents St. Paul's overwhelm-

Not Disobedient

ing experience as something abnormal and miraculous. Yet there remains a sense in which every believer's faith dates from a heavenly vision. The Divine call reaches us at sundry times and in divers manners. God reveals His Son to us gradually—through a godly home, or by the influence of the Church, or in the pages of the Gospel. Perchance we caught our first glimpse of Christ reflected in the lineaments of those who love Him. But by whatever means, the same result has come to pass. If we are Christians, it is because we have been brought into immediate personal contact with the reality of the Risen Lord.

The apostle has summed up the sequel of that great day when Christ met him face to face: *I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.* Because such a Divine manifestation to the human spirit carries its own commanding claim. To us, as to St. Paul, it speaks with accents which are not of this world. We cannot come into

Not Disobedient

the presence of Perfect Goodness without feeling its moral imperative. The shining ideal of duty, as soon as we perceive it, becomes an instant challenge to our allegiance ; and if we reject it, we make the great refusal. Many of our Lord's mightiest parables and precepts hinge upon the act of personal obedience. It is wonderful how wide an area of the inward life is covered by the question, " Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ? " Henry More, the Cambridge Platonist, wrote : " It were to be wished the Quinquarticular points were all reduced to this one, namely, ' That none shall be saved without sincere obedience.' " There is no deeper secret of holiness, no surer way to practise the presence of God. We are told of Elizabeth Fry that during the illness of which she died she was able to witness this beautiful confession : " I believe I can truly say that since the age of seventeen I have never waked from sleep, in sickness or in health, by day or night,

Not Disobedient

without my first waking thought being how I might best serve the Lord."

Consider some features of our collective Christian obedience. The Reformers and Puritans bore witness against what they used to call the apostasy of the Roman Church. They declared that medieval Christendom had been disobedient to its heavenly vision. But the Protestant Church is assailed by similar temptations to disobedience. Preachers become less than faithful, for example, if they emphasize only those aspects of God's revelation which appear to be fashionable and popular. Because the testimony which any generation most needs is not the truth which it is most inclined to obey. Thus, for instance, a commercial age will resent or reject our Lord's stern warnings against worldliness and the love of luxury and the pursuit of riches. But we dare not expurgate the Gospel: "That which I received of the Lord, I also delivered unto you." It is not for us to accept a selection of Christ's

Not Disobedient

commandments, or to carry some chosen splinter of His Cross. The Church has it in charge to declare the full counsel of God.

During the War, how we all grew enthusiastic over our gallant sailors and soldiers. We paid proud and thankful homage to their courage, their good fellowship, their endurance, their cheerfulness, their contempt of danger. Yet, as one naval chaplain was Christian enough to point out, these qualities may all belong to a genial pagan, who has no conscience of sin, no faith in purity, no thought of the life to come. We dare not disguise the profound defects and inherent limitations of such a character, in spite of its charm. We are false to the ideal of Christian manhood if we pretend that Christ does not also demand in every man reverence and repentance and humility and prayer, that Christ does not bestow forgiveness and peace and a clean heart and the sure hope of heaven. So again we joyfully recognize the success of recent developments

Not Disobedient

like the Brotherhood movement, and the Student Christian movement, and the expansion of the Y.M.C.A. Yet in loyalty to Christ Himself we may not treat these institutions as if they could serve as substitutes for the witness and worship and sacraments of Christ's Church. So again we praise God with exultant hearts because a new vision of Christian reconciliation and reunion has in these latter days dawned upon His scattered and sundered children. Yet we should be faithless to that glorious vision, we should betray it, if we consented to purchase ecclesiastical unity at the price of spiritual convictions which have passed into our experience as iron passes into the blood. To obey God can never mean merely to choose the line of least resistance. "Our obedience must be, in will if not in deed, obedience unto death, even the death of the Cross."

We conclude, therefore, that to follow Jesus Christ in spirit and in truth means to

Not Disobedient

live in loyalty to the Divine ideal which has dawned on the soul through Him and in Him. If we disobey this revelation we do despite to the Holy Spirit. Yet human nature has a dreadful capacity for turning away from the open vision of God. The Bible speaks solemn words of warning concerning the doom of the disloyal. "There are strange punishments for such." Gradually they come to forget that they had been once enlightened. The heavenly vision which visited them seems now a mere idle dream. The spiritual city itself, the goal of all the saints, which once shone before them, has dwindled into the least of little stars. Another side of their penalty is suggested by that obscure passage in the New Testament which speaks of "spirits in prison, which sometime were disobedient." Because such disobedient spirits lie captive in a dungeon which they have created for themselves. They have forged their own fetters. The proud, wilful souls who refused

Not Disobedient

to obey became thereby shut out from the glorious liberty of the children of God. On the other hand, obedience is the organ of spiritual knowledge—our instrument for the discovery and verification of spiritual truth. To be delivered from shadows and illusions, to be led into inward certainty, there is no other way but this. The man who is faithful to his present illumination, imperfect though it be, always finds fuller light waiting for him along the road. He shall know the truth, and the truth shall make him free. As he loyally obeys that ideal that he already discerns in part, the eyes of his understanding are opened to a still clearer, ampler, surer vision of things unseen and eternal,

Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
But vision—yea, his very hand and foot—
In moments when he feels he cannot die,
And knows himself no vision to himself,
Nor the High God a vision, nor that One
Who rose again.

XIV

THE PATIENCE OF GOD

The Bible, which records the self-revelation of God, bids us worship in His nature those same virtues which we can dimly recognize in human nature at its noblest and best. Indeed, Plato and the mystics tell us that nothing worshipful exists in any man's character on earth except as a broken reflection of its correspondence in heaven. Personal qualities, such as truth and loyalty and endurance and tenderness and sympathy and self-forgetful devotion, point us to their perfect archetypes in Him Who is the Father of the spirits of all flesh. Purified and made perfect, these qualities blend into His glory, they belong to His very Being. It was from this standpoint that Charles Kingsley urged that St. Paul's

The Patience of God

hymn in praise of charity must apply to the Divine Love, so that we have a right to say : " God suffereth long and is kind. God seeketh not His own. God beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. God never faileth."

Scripture speaks to us repeatedly and in plain words about God's inexpressible patience. Again and again the prophets and saints of Israel appeal to His long-suffering and praise His mercy which endureth for ever. They exhort us to wait patiently for God, because He never grows weary of waiting for us. An epistle in the New Testament even commands us to " account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation." As we meditate on this deep doctrine we become aware that it stretches far beyond our ken. For it involves the unsearchable truth that God must needs behold all things *sub specie æternitatis*. He knows the end from the beginning, Who is

The Patience of God

Himself the First and the Last. Yet when the wisest men try to draw logical conclusions from the fact of this Divine foreknowledge, they go astray and find no end, in wandering mazes lost. Because we have not skill to think and reason outside the category of time. This is our infirmity ; yet will we remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. And we stand on solid ground in our conviction that the patience of God is akin to that which we call patience in our fellow-creatures. If it be true here on earth, as a poet declares, that—

Endurance is the crowning quality,
And patience all the passion of great hearts,

then we can be confident that a corresponding truth reigns and rules in the very Heart of heaven.

The unspeakable patience of God becomes manifest in the processes of His creative will. He has ordained that living things shall evolve through generations of painful

The Patience of God

struggle, and He fainteth not neither is weary as He considers them while they grow. Who can number the ages that God has taken to paint the feathers on a butterfly's wing, or to perfect the musical-box in a song-bird's throat? To-day, Englishmen fret and vex their souls over the problem of their coal-pits; but through how many slow millenniums was God's finger forming the coal? More marvellous still is His patience in developing the races of mankind. Think of the cost of moral progress among savage tribes, the tardy emergence of laws and ideals and social order. Read the chequered tale of empires and dynasties in Egypt, for instance, or in China. Surely we must confess that God moves in a mysterious way in His gradual education of the world.

Not less unfathomable is the patience of God in dealing with His Church. The Divine Seed, once sown in weakness and planted in a sepulchre, was raised in power while

The Patience of God

men slept, and it spread abroad and multiplied, they knew not how, and bore fruit in the waste places of the earth. Yet to-day, so many centuries after the Incarnation and Resurrection, Christ's faithful in every land are still a little flock, Christ's victory over evil appears partial and fragmentary, Christ's kingdom as we behold it seems rent asunder and divided against itself. Christians who believe most profoundly in "the insight, foresight, and oversight of God" find themselves least able to explain the dark delays of His providence in the Church's progress and triumph. How often eager hearts have prayed for His steps among the stars to quicken, have longed passionately that they might not taste of death till they had seen His kingdom come with power. Yet it stands written that when the souls of martyrs that were under the altar of heaven cried aloud, "O Lord, how long?" the one answer vouchsafed to them was that they should wait.

The Patience of God

Assuredly we on earth also have need of patience, that after we have done the will of God we may receive His promise.

Consider, for instance, the problem of modern missions to Moslem and heathen lands. In the tangible results of their work we see far more than our faith deserved, yet certainly far less than our hope expected. Herein we have yet to master the secret of God's imperturbable patience. Christians who proclaim a crusade to evangelize the world in the space of one generation might pause to ponder what "evangelize" properly means. As Father Benson wrote : " People have a kind of idea that Christianity spreads by a *Veni, vidi, vici* process ! A strange conclusion to four thousand years of preparation ! " But the Gospel holds out no promise of quick returns. In God's due season His sowers shall reap, if they faint not. But that season may lie beyond the veil, amid the golden harvests of the life to come. True spiritual conquests can

The Patience of God

only be achieved in the strength of quiet confidence. Our Lord Himself moved on to His appointed end without haste, filled with strange and serene tranquillity. He shared that patience of God which is part of the peace of God and passeth all understanding.

We gain some clue to its mystery when we look within and turn the pages in our book of memory and recall the unutterable, invincible patience of God in His dealing with us personally. Search the record of your own experience, and remember how He has tarried for your repentance, how He has borne with your reluctance, how year by year His Spirit has striven with your perversity and self-will, how He never grows weary of forgiving you and crowning you with loving-kindness and tender mercies, how in spite of all discouragement and ingratitude He still goes on graciously to finish the work which He has begun. Our only hope of enduring to the end is rooted in the final perseverance of our God. One

The Patience of God

treason, at least, has become impossible for us—"the treason of doubting that God's desire for our holiness is immeasurably greater than our own."

The unsearchable patience of God delivers us from the sin of being impatient with one another—just as His endless mercy constrains us to forgive one another. Half our human quarrels have their roots in hasty judgment and personal prejudice and wounded self-esteem. Controversy always brings out the bad side of those who engage in it. And this assuredly holds true of theological and ecclesiastical controversy. It is not real love of truth which makes us so bitter. And we forget that—in the words of Benjamin Whichcote, the Cambridge Platonist—"the maintenance of truth is rather God's charge, and the continuance of charity ours." How often those who contend for the Faith delivered to the saints injure its cause by their harshness, their irritable temper, their unholy longing to

The Patience of God

beat down opponents. How often we alienate and exasperate the souls we set out to convince. So long as you keep on the watch to detect errors in your brother, you are certain to magnify and distort his errors and to harden him in cleaving to them. Nay, you will fall into more grievous error yourself: because Christian truth is simply the pure manifestation of Christ—Who is essential Love. Only so far as we are possessed by the Holy Spirit of sympathy and forbearance and long-suffering can we begin to understand Christians who are divided from us in doctrine or in Church order, and to appreciate those aspects of truth which they represent. From the nature of the case, a real spiritual reconciliation can never be forced or hurried. Concerning the things which belong to the Church's peace, our highest calling and election here may often be to possess our souls in patience.

For we are living in days when even good men strive and cry, and partisans lift

The Patience of God

up their voice in the newspapers, and Christ's own apostles sometimes seem out of breath, like people trying to catch a train. At such seasons the solemn patience of God appears as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. When we are most sorely tempted to lose patience—with the world, or with the Church, or with our fellow-men—this overwhelming reality of His tireless love rebukes and humbles and subdues our spirits. We take heart to believe that throughout the universe God's patience shall have its perfect work at last.

XV

A GOODLY LENT

In one fashion or another the majority of Christians in the world keep Lent. And even though we may feel ourselves liberated from bondage to times and seasons in the ecclesiastical calendar, we cannot be unmoved when so many millions of our fellow-believers set themselves afresh to face the duty of self-denial. For this is what Lent implies and involves, if it be taken seriously. It looks forward to Passion Week, and in prospect of that commemoration Christians naturally seek to arm themselves with the same mind. As they realize once more that their redemption is rooted in the Divine self-sacrifice, they recoil from human self-indulgence. "What a shame," cried St.

A Goodly Lent

Bernard, "to be a delicate member of the Head crowned with thorns." Lent originally was an attempt to give outward expression to this profound Christian instinct.

Often indeed the attempt has taken fantastic shapes, and has run to seed in practices which appear to us childish or superstitious or grossly material. Too many Lenten observances obscure the sacred idea which they strive to embody, and pervert the simplicity and spirituality of the New Testament. Abstinence, indeed, can be advocated and carried out in ways which turn it into a parody of genuine self-denial. Some forms of fasting are no better than refined self-indulgence. A man who lives surrounded with luxuries can take positive pleasure in doing without them for a little while, so that he may go back with all the keener zest to the tint of his purple and the softness of his fine linen. Many persons adopt abstinence for the sake of health and

A Goodly Lent

energy, as when a gouty man gives up alcohol or a rowing man goes into strict training before a boat-race. So, again, on æsthetic grounds an artist will condemn profusion, and declare that "it is worse than wicked, it is vulgar." And on intellectual grounds we may believe that a rigid fast from novels and newspapers would revive in many jaded minds the taste for great literature. None of these motives, however, can be called distinctly Christian.

But there is another ground for keeping Lent which multitudes have held and still hold strenuously. They cling to the ascetic ideal which has exerted such immense influence over Christendom. They believe, broadly speaking, that one chief enemy of the soul is the body, and that in proportion as they mortify and macerate their physical appetites and impulses they will attain spiritual vigour and victory. By this belief they justify the austere discipline of the flesh which the Roman Church has en-

A Goodly Lent

couraged, if not enjoined. We hold, indeed, with the Reformers, that the theory and the practice are founded upon a false dualism. We reject the doctrine that fasting *per se* has meritorious value, and we question whether it really aids devotional feeling. Habitual temperance is more wholesome, and more religious, than recurrent austerities. Normally, the conditions most favourable to holiness result from the healthy, well-balanced interaction of body and mind.

Yet while we reject this ascetic theory as mistaken, we dare not therefore think scornfully of the devout men and women innumerable who have embraced such stern methods for self-discipline and self-conquest. Some of the greatest saints have used these strange means as helps to the holy life. It is true, indeed, that God takes no pleasure in man's self-inflicted suffering. But there is another side to that truth. Lent may at least remind modern Christians that Christ does call them to something higher and

A Goodly Lent

nobler than physical comfort. A distinguished continental scholar has declared that the most characteristic word of the English tongue and the English people to-day is the word "comfort"—a word steeped and saturated with materialism. One cardinal precept in the Gospel might be read: *Ye cannot serve God and comfort.* And surely that precept comes home to every man for whom "the garden of Gethsemane is more sacred than the garden of Epicurus." In his own daily experience a Christian proves that to hold fast the one thing needful involves the letting go of other things lovely and desirable, and that in thought as well as in action he must steadily narrow his way, forsaking the good for the Best. True Christian asceticism does not war against pleasure, but against disturbing passions and artificial wants and a dependence upon things external and accidental. We know only too well how easily we can accustom ourselves to mere

A Goodly Lent

comfort, and how difficult it is to tear ourselves away from luxuries which have become habitual and, little by little, indispensable. As Lacordaire wrote : " It always seems to me that the retrenchment of useless expenditure, the laying aside of what one may call the relatively necessary, is the high-road to Christian disentanglement of heart."

Yet to say this only touches the fringe of the spiritual problem which Lent propounds. We need ^{not}, indeed, bring texts or arguments to demonstrate that self-denial is a Christian duty. It is far more than a duty : it is an imperious instinct of the redeemed soul. Confronted with the simplicity and severity of Jesus Christ, self-indulgence appears as an ingratitude, a sacrilege, which only a Christian can commit. (But when we consider more deeply, we begin to understand ^{that} the essence of self-denial lies not in embracing bodily hardships or forsaking outward possessions, but ultimately

A Goodly Lent

in the surrender of the will. The secret of every pure and acceptable service, breathing through all its litanies, is the whispered undertone of Christ's own prayer, "Not My will, but Thine be done." To-day, as of old, the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit—that, and nothing else, and nothing less. And therefore our supreme and final surrender may not be made to anyone or to anything except to God alone.

Readers of Mark Rutherford will recall the sermon which Mr. Bradshaw preached in Pike Street Chapel on the text, *Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: but in the place which the Lord hath chosen, there shalt thou offer thy burnt offerings, and there shalt thou do all that I command thee.* Transcending the ancient Hebrew ritual, that text sums up one of the piercing truths of the Bible, which can stab our consciences like a sword. For it warns us against the

A Goodly Lent

wilfulness which taints and spoils our very sacrifice of self. Christian sacrifice in spirit and in truth means surrender to the living will of the living God. Nothing short of God's calling and election can justify a man yielding his all. We dare not pour out our hearts on altars by the wayside, chosen at our own pleasure. God Himself appoints the place where our sacrifice must be offered up. To Abraham His friend, He said, *Take now thy son, thine only son whom thou lovest, and offer him upon one of the mountains that I will tell thee of.* As God Himself must be the supreme Object of spiritual surrender, so God Himself shows us that our sacrifice must be complete not only in motive but in detail. He Who claims the offering also chooses the altar.

Here lies the ultimate test of loyalty, the final proof of submission. Many a man feels that he would not shrink from martyrdom, if only he might arrange the stage and

A Goodly Lent

spectators and make a glorious, heroic, pathetic end. But in common experience God calls you to bear the pang without the palm. He ordains for you some hidden agony which you must endure in silence and alone. No one else suspects that you are giving up a treasure which is dearer than your life. No one else notices that you are being nailed to the cross. Herein is the hardest ordeal of a faithful soul. To devote his time and fortune to some public charity may become the pride of the philanthropist. It is not so hard to go crusading under a banner already gilded by the sunrise of victory. But the Lord may allot you nothing but a sentinel's post in the holy war. Christ may bid you consecrate yourself to some obscure and humble duty. He may appoint for you some forlorn venture, some unpopular cause, so that while you are alive you can never see it succeed. He may link your mission with men who disappoint you or betray you, men who make your labour

A Goodly Lent

of love appear like a pitiful, sordid failure. Many a Christian would rejoice to spend himself in helping people whom he cares for, especially if he may do it in a way which appeals to him. What if God bind up your lot with the loveless and the thankless? What if He call you to dedicate your best years to some fretful invalid, to some selfish relatives who never realize how much they exact and seem barely grateful? Yet our devotion remains impure so long as it depends upon human gratitude. When we have grace to lavish our spikenard ungrudgingly upon those whom the Lord has given us to cherish, not because they are attractive or hopeful or even thankful, but simply because He loves them as much as He loves us and has put them into our keeping—then, verily, we do it unto Him.

The tokens of the Divine Will are seldom doubtful to those disciples who humbly seek God's guiding in order that they may obey

A Goodly Lent

Him with full purpose of heart. The same Voice which claims the sacrifice reveals the altar. We need not say lo! here, or lo! there: generally it is not far distant—here, by our very doorway—there, among our own kith and kin. But the essence of God's election is that the altar does not stand where we expect, and the offering is not what we would choose. And the joyful acceptance of His awful and blessed Will becomes part of our surrender, without which we cannot be made perfect. No consecration is complete so long as we make it reluctantly. General Gordon penetrated to the root of the whole matter when he said: "I learned that to be like Christ, we must not only have our will subordinated to His, but we must be delighted to have it so." Bind this sacrifice with cords, even to the horns of the altar.

✓
It is good to be last, not first,
Pending the present distress;

A Goodly Lent

It is good to hunger and thirst,
So it be for righteousness.
It is good to spend and be spent,
It is good to watch and to pray ;
Life and Death make a goodly Lent,
So it leads to Easter Day.

XVI

LOVE STRONGER THAN DEATH

The Jewish rabbis believed that it was springtime when God finished His six days' work of creation. We keep Easter in the spring, when new life quickens and stirs on every side. The tyranny of winter is over. Nature herself, having been planted in the likeness of death, awakes in the likeness of resurrection. Flowers were blossoming thick in Joseph's garden on that first Day of the Lord, and nesting birds broke forth into joy and sang together before sunrise, when the stone was found rolled away from a forsaken grave, and Christ testified concerning Himself : " I am He that liveth ; and I became dead : and behold I am alive for evermore." Often

Love Stronger than Death

we forget that Easter occurs not once a year but once a week. Why do Christians keep sacred the first day in every seven? Not because of Jewish Sabbaths, but because the primitive Church by instinct fixed on the day of Christ's resurrection for the festival of His worship. Most of us think about Sunday as if it were part of the order of nature instead of being, as it is, a creation and monument of Christian faith. The Sundays of the Church's life, "threaded together on time's string," make one long chain of witnesses that the Lord is risen indeed. They date back in unbroken sequence to His empty grave. Therefore Sunday by Sunday we confess one to another: "This is the Lord's Day, this is the Lord's doing; and it is marvellous in our eyes."

The Gospel could never have had any being if Jesus Christ had slept on in the sepulchre. For His disciples, Good Friday ended in black despair. When they saw

Love Stronger than Death

Him die, their faith and hope died also and were buried in the same tomb ; and if He had not risen, faith and hope must have lain there still. Christianity and its Founder expired together, and together they came back from the dead. The Church was born on Easter Day, and its apostles went everywhere preaching with tongues of fire, " Jesus and the resurrection."

Easter we have always with us. There are two universal rites which began with the Church's beginning and continue unto this day ; and both Christian Sacraments bear testimony to the resurrection. For what does Baptism imply ? Its earliest form was an immersion, and the first believers saw in the act of their own baptism a parable of their share in the dying and rising again of the Redeemer. As they went down under that chill bath, it was like a dying to sin, a burial of their guilty past : as they came out of the water, it was like a rising into their new, purified, transfigured

Love Stronger than Death

life with God. To those primitive Christians every baptism, like every Sunday, proclaimed that the Lord is risen indeed. And what does the Communion declare? It celebrates the death of Christ—but death conquered by life, death swallowed up in victory. At the Easter Eucharist in the Orthodox Church each wafer bears stamped on it the letters “I.X.N.”—which stand for the words “Jesus Christ conquers.” The bread which we break, the cup which we bless, while they commemorate Love’s redeeming sacrifice offered once for all, bring our spirits also into fellowship with the risen King of Love, Whose living Presence is in the midst of us to-day. In that He died, He died unto sin once. But Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more.

The New Testament refers to our Lord’s resurrection as something marvellous and awful and unearthly, and yet as something which was also almost natural—for such a

Love Stronger than Death

one as He. If we believe, as Christians have always believed, that Jesus Christ is a Divine and unique Being, we shall not find it incredible or even unnatural that the circumstances of His birth into the world, and of His withdrawal in bodily presence from the world, should be also unique. On this stage of time all men have their entrances and their exits. But the Incarnation of the Son of God presupposes something beyond normal human routine. The resurrection is not incongruous with the Redeemer. When they looked back at it afterwards, the apostles became aware that Jesus Christ, being Who He was, must needs rise Conqueror over all the principalities of darkness. Death had no dominion over Him. For He had power to lay down His life, and power to take it again. The grave could not detain Him Who had life in Himself. He rose, "as a man wakes in the morning and sleep flies from him as a thing of course." He rose, for

Love Stronger than Death

He was the Living One even among the dead.

Yet, just on this account, an event of such a kind must needs be difficult to demonstrate, difficult even to describe. Because it only partly belongs to the order of our present life and the experience of our senses. Small wonder if the narratives of the resurrection recorded in the Gospels seem fragmentary and in some details hardly consistent. Is it not inevitable that such an occurrence must transcend men's common powers of observation, and that the evidence men can give of it must appear less than complete? From the nature of the case the resurrection involves a deep mystery, and much that relates to it lies beyond our skill to analyse or understand. Yet this, after all, is surely not strange or surprising. When we ponder the miracle of Easter and try to measure its meaning, we begin to realize that it lifts the veil which conceals the spiritual order of things and presents

Love Stronger than Death

us with experience of a life beyond the grave. Because the resurrection of Jesus Christ confronts us with the amazing fact of One Who has actually died, Who is yet shown to be living on in transfigured manhood. To Him, dying has proved not a catastrophe, but a marvellous change—not destruction, but transformation. If we believe the New Testament, that body wherein the Word was made flesh rose into a new manner of living. Through a change which must needs be inscrutable by us, it became a spiritual body, “wholly penetrated and transformed by the unhindered glory of God,” revealing a higher kind of existence possible to men—an existence in which mortality is swallowed up of life.

When we meditate more deeply and reverently, we begin to understand that the ultimate mystery of Easter lies entangled in the connexion between human personality and its material form. Now within recent

Love Stronger than Death

years science has made startling advances in physics and in psychology. God has been teaching us to think clearer thoughts about what personality involves, and thoughts not less new about what matter amounts to. Half a century ago the masters of physical science, like Clerk Maxwell, conceived of atoms as solid, uniform particles, inconceivably minute. To-day we are told that each of these infinitesimal atoms is itself nothing but a maelstrom of electric energy. As a wise man puts it, we know too much about matter to be materialists now. So, again, our ideas about human personality have expanded and grown much more complex. There is evidence that the influence of personality can be far greater than was formerly supposed. Exceptional individuals are able to exert astonishing powers over the minds and thereby over the bodies of other individuals. Indeed, "the question of miracles seems to be part of the question of the power of mind over matter—on

Love Stronger than Death

which the last word has certainly not been said." Assuredly we may look forward to gaining wider knowledge of the range of power that can be attained by human personalities, as they become penetrated and possessed by the Holy Spirit of God.

We confess freely that these modern researches in physics and in psychology are by no means all securely established, or fully correlated one with another. But already we can recognize how they are conspiring to confirm, rather than to deny, our Christian faith in a universe where spirit is meant to be the master of matter and not its slave. Perhaps the final significance of the Easter miracle lies in this—it assures us that the moral and the spiritual lie at the core even of physical power. The Lord of perfect goodness has loosed the bonds of death, because it was not possible for Him to be holden of them. By His resurrection He certifies us that this material order of

Love Stronger than Death

things has at its root the righteous Will of God. Beyond our earthy decay and dissolution there lives and reigns the One immortal, omnipotent Love. All through the centuries the Christian Church has drawn unexhausted life from the fountain of His living Personality. Because He lives, His Church lives also.

The first Easter proclaimed that Love is the conqueror of death. But it did even more. As Westcott points out, it has lifted the veil which hides the spiritual order of being, and given us experience of what lies after death. We repeat that the Lord's resurrection shows us how dying can mean not catastrophe but change, not a destruction but a transformation. It confronts us with the actual fact of One Who had died, proved to be living on in new and transfigured manhood—the same Person, but alive for evermore. Thus Easter is like a door opened into heaven. It discloses a new kind of existence possible to men—an

Love Stronger than Death

existence in which mortality is swallowed up of life.

Christ would not have us ignorant concerning them that are asleep. On Easter Day we can give thanks, even through our tears, for those faces which we have loved long since and lost only for a while. With profound instinct millions of Christians make Easter pilgrimage to the graves which for them are the saddest and most sacred spots on earth. By His Holy Sepulchre Christ consecrates all our sepulchres. He transforms the churchyard into a garden of confident hope, whose every corner at last shall render unto God the things that are God's. In our Easter worship we come unto Mount Zion and to the spirits of just men made perfect. Our Easter anthem is incomplete unless we praise God for the blessed dead, who have put on their garments of immortality. Already they join hands with us across the shadows; they speak to us, and they bid us be of good cheer. "Be

Treasure in Heaven

thieves. Christ looked upon covetousness as a deadly sin which destroys the soul. Among all the powers of evil He singled out Mammon as the direct antagonist of God.

When our Lord commands us to lay up treasure not on earth but in heaven, many people understand Him to be uttering a maxim in regard to religious thrift and foresight—as though this were only an improved and amended version of one of the proverbs of Solomon. But a Greater than Solomon is speaking here. The clue to the passage lies in its final sentence : “ *For*, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Christ is not just warning misers that any day they may be robbed of the gold they have raked together, and that they must infallibly leave it all behind them before very long. In point of fact, men as a rule are not literally misers ; they hanker after money, for the sake of what money will buy. Moreover, covetous-

Treasure in Heaven

ness is a vice which knows no respect of persons. It can infect a cottager no less than a capitalist. Peasants may be guilty of profiteering. Small shopkeepers may grow close-fisted and mean. A trade union may prove mercenary, as well as a millionaire. "Treasure," it is true, takes variegated shapes and borrows all manner of strange disguises. A man may set his heart on this object or on that—on his library, or his garden, or his stud, or his success in business, or his seat in Parliament. But nearly every man is secretly inclined to hoard some kind of treasure. He cherishes a darling object, round which his hopes circle and his plans crystallize. Some dominant interest absorbs him so that his thoughts constantly wing their way back to it, like homing birds. Now each man's inner self will become in the end possessed by his dearest possession. Your heart perforce goes into partnership with your treasure, so that they share the same

Treasure in Heaven

fortunes and suffer the same fate. Christ's solemn warning against setting our affections on things that are earthly and transient means not merely that such things vanish away, and we must therefore endure the bitterness of their loss and the blank they leave behind. The argument is far more penetrating and profound. Our heart becomes entangled and made one with our treasure: and therefore the man whose nature is bound up with any corruptible object must needs share its corruption. He must suffer as it suffers, from the moth and the rust and the thief. He is infected with its diseases, and dragged into its haunts. The curse of unworthy and ignoble treasures, as George MacDonald pointed out, is not that you lose them, but that as they perish you yourself go down into the grave of their perdition. The heart of your heart becomes cankered with pride, and corroded with cares, and worm-eaten with the gnawings of ambition, and consumed with the slow

Treasure in Heaven

fire of the rust of selfishness—a worm which dieth not, a fire which is not quenched.

This solemn lesson concerning earthly and heavenly treasure is translated into their own dialect by certain of our present-day thinkers, when they emphasize the unspeakable difference between what they call “survival values” and “absolute values.” It is not difficult to understand roughly what those terms stand for. If we prize our own existence above and beyond everything else in the world, we shall desire supremely to go on living, and therefore we shall reckon things to be valuable in so far as they assist us to survive. But the instinct of self-preservation is only one factor in human nature. Beyond these survival values we are aware of another kind of values of quite a different order—values which we must call “absolute,” because they are inherently precious and to be desired for their own sake, quite apart from any possible use or service which they

Treasure in Heaven

may yield to us. Truth and Beauty and Goodness are the grand examples of absolute values. But to love and worship Truth and Beauty and Goodness means to love and worship God. And so, when Christ resolves all religion and all duty into Love, He is pointing to the one treasure in heaven which faileth not. And He Himself makes us aware that this Love, which He incarnates in His own Person, carries the pledge of its own everlastingness ; it has the quality and fragrance of eternity. Absolute Truth and Beauty and Goodness have been manifested once and for all, and found in fashion as a Man. Alone among the sons of men He was utterly unworldly. In His low estate He rose high above all the allurements and ambitions which distract mankind. Weighed in the balances of His heart, money counted for less than nothing, in comparison with tenderness and compassion. His detachment appears something natural and effortless, His humility is unconscious and unaware

Treasure in Heaven

of itself. "He has not even refused the kingdom of this world, He has transcended it, turning from jewels to flowers like a child." In His eyes all men had absolute values, while survival values seemed of no account. By His passion of redeeming love He saved others; but Himself He never tried to save.

St. Paul was echoing our Lord's own words about treasure in heaven when he wrote : "Set your affection on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." There is no other secret of detachment but this. For man is drawn by his strongest motive. His path, like a planet's, is determined by the prevailing force which attracts him. Yet he is free to determine what force shall have opportunity to attract him, what powers shall be free to play upon his soul. Any motive or example which we bring near to ourselves, which we contemplate steadily and consider closely, exerts on us an influence increased in that proportion.

Treasure in Heaven

When once the Person of Christ—crucified, risen, and reigning—holds the chief place in our thought, He Himself will exercise His own invincible attraction, according to the mighty working whereby He is able to raise all souls unto Himself. A Christian means a man who has fallen in love with Christ : and where his treasure is, there will his heart be also.

XVIII

THE CHARGE OF GOD'S ELECT

In *Paradise Lost* two passages stand in curious contrast. When Milton tries to imagine angels at leisure, he tells us that the unarmed youth of heaven "exercised heroic games." Elsewhere he describes how fallen spirits "entertained the irksome hours": they sat on a hill retired,

And reasoned high
Of providence, foreknowledge, will and fate—
Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute—
And found no end, in wandering mazes lost.

This contrast, which is certainly not without design, strikes almost a modern note. Nowadays we glorify athletics *in excelsis*. On the other hand, we are ready to abandon the problem of predestination for lost minds to argue over. To us it appears like a

The Charge of God's Elect

labyrinth, wherein the wisest men have missed their way. Yet that problem is as ancient as religion. It involves the crux of philosophy as well as of theology. It belongs to the categories of thought by which we reason, quite as much as to the the faith by which we live. History shows that prophets and heroes and martyrs have believed passionately in their own predestination. As James Russell Lowell used to say, it is Calvinists who have founded Commonwealths. Argue about it as we may, God's sovereign choice is no mere metaphysical dogma but an immense practical reality. Serious men recognize that the facts which determine their own lot in life have been chosen for them. We do not select our race, or our colour, or our speech, or our native soil. Each man's temperament and training and traditions, his home and his kinsfolk, are fore-ordained and pre-determined by his Maker. The Bible declares that the God Who remembered us

The Charge of God's Elect

and loved us before we knew father and mother, has beset us behind and before and laid His hand upon us from the moment we first drew breath. Each separate soul has its place in the mysterious election of Eternal Love.

Who maketh thee to differ from another, and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? That question pierces below the differences which separate man from man, and class from class, and nation from nation. We are learning through the lips of unexpected teachers how it is that we have come to possess the best things which we count as our own. Those distinctive points about us, which we take pride in because they mark us out and lift us up above our fellows, belong to us not by any merit of ours but simply by God's appointment. They are not like wages which we earn : they are sheer gifts which we inherit, according to His unsearchable will. And being God's free gifts, they become a

The Charge of God's Elect

solemn and sacred charge. Herein our privilege is the measure of our responsibility.

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required ; and to whom men have committed much, of him will they ask the more.

This consequence and corollary of the doctrine of election can come home to us by more than one channel. Think, for instance, how strange a fact it is that we should be living our lives now, and not five hundred or fifteen hundred years ago. People sometimes try to fancy what their experiences would be like had they been born in a different century. Yet when we boast proudly about progress, it may sober us to realize that modern science after all has been made possible through ancient experiments and endeavours, that the simplest inventions were perhaps the hardest and the earliest discoveries were the greatest of all. We can build palaces, because folk who lived in wattled huts first reared an arch. We can forge engines, because name-

The Charge of God's Elect

less savages found out how to kindle a fire, and then how to fashion a wheel. We possess treasures of literature, because men invented an alphabet when the world was young. Each flower and fruit of civilization has its roots far back in a forgotten past. Our century is rich and increased in goods, because by God's election it is the heir of all the ages behind it. But surely to whom so much is given, from it shall much be required. Surely this Dives among generations is appointed to lift up the Lazarus who is still lying at its gate.

St. Paul puts his challenge in a personal form: "Who maketh *thee* to differ?" More than once the Apostle declares that between human souls there is no difference in regard to the greatest things, the things which matter most. By our common sin and our common redemption we all stand on one level—we are children of the same Father, objects of the same Passion, heirs together of life beyond the grave. Never-

The Charge of God's Elect

theless, St. Paul recognizes those strange differences which God has chosen to create between persons in the present world. Human equality may count as a political convention, but God has not willed to make us all alike. We vary amazingly in health and strength, in skill and capacity and success. In these days people often grow bitter because of unfair social distinctions and the unequal distribution of wealth. How can one man be rich, they ask, unless other men are poor in comparison? For wealth is a relative thing; it means power to command service. And leisure is one product of wealth. Your leisure implies that some other men have done or are doing your share of rough labour in addition to their own. Your luxury means that someone else has lived or is living as far below the average of comfort as you are above it. Your superfluity arises out of his defect. In this sense, what have you which you have not received?

The Charge of God's Elect

But the challenge lays its hand on possessions which are far more precious than money. It applies to the treasures of the inward man—those instincts and faculties and ideals which go to make up his personality. The history of the human race teaches us that progress in moral perception and in spiritual intuition has been bought with a price, and purchased by long centuries of conflict and sacrifice and failure. Because through age after age men wrestled with the brute beast within them and trampled on it and subdued it, our lusts to-day can be more swiftly mastered. Because they loved righteousness and hated iniquity and battled for truth, our consciences to-day are more sensitive to discern good and evil. Because they sought after God and thirsted for His fellowship and longed to behold His face and died confessing that they were pilgrims upon earth, our spirits are more quick to discern His Presence, our prayers are more easy, and our heaven is more near. Because

The Charge of God's Elect

apostles and reformers and missionaries held aloft the Christian ideal and handed on the Christian tradition, because multitudes of obscure saints carried the cross and kept the faith to the end, our thoughts are moulded by the Gospel, our hearts are kindled by the love of Christ. We who are the heirs of Christendom, the children of the Church militant on earth, what have we that we did not receive? This age-long spiritual labour and struggle and endurance passed into our very being, as iron passes into the blood. We modern men and women to-day, in body and mind and soul, are the offspring of sacrifice: *we are debtors.*

Science and history and ethics, as well as Scripture, show us that we are reaping where we ourselves never planted. A man's property and position, his abilities and powers—whatever is best about him and best in himself—come to him as gifts from God, evolved through painful development,

The Charge of God's Elect

handed down by patient toil. And so each man lives under an incalculable obligation. He owes a debt to his Maker and to his fellow-men—a debt only measured by his power to repay. In simple justice and honour he is bound to use his personal gifts not for himself, but for the sake of others. Now and again scandals arise in regard to misused endowments. Perhaps generations ago some country lad left his home and made a fortune, and then bequeathed lands in trust for the benefit of the poor in his native town. But as time went by the trustees grew slack or dishonest, they appropriated the revenue to themselves or to their own class, and the poor have been defrauded of their due. Now we speak about men who are endowed with special gifts—brains or beauty or skill or wit or eloquence. But each personal endowment is in like manner a trust, to be laid out in the service of those less amply endowed. And when we appropriate these gifts of God

The Charge of God's Elect

and use them for our individual pleasure and profit, we are defrauding His little ones and His poor. The unselfish life is not a mere work of supererogation, a counsel of perfection : it is *the charge of God's elect*. Human endowments, whether they be physical or intellectual or social or spiritual, are the signs and token of what God requires of the men to whom He entrusts them. Whatever grace or privilege or power we possess, we hold it as stewards and trustees. *Now it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.*

Everyone feels that he himself is somehow distinguished from his neighbours, marked out among them by some kind of personal superiority. Just precisely *that* is the seal upon you of God's election, the index of God's claim. He gives you manly courage and energy, so that you may shield and succour the weak. He gives you womanly grace and tact and charm, so that you may win back them that have gone astray.

The Charge of God's Elect

He gives you bright spirits and a happy temper, so that you may comfort the sorrowful. He gives you persevering patience, so that you may confirm the unstable and tempted. He gives you a clear brain and furnished memory, so that you may teach the unlettered wayfaring man. He gives you deep and delicate sympathy, so that you may enter into human miseries and discern their cause and their cure. He gives you money, so that you may use it for the disinherited. He gives you leisure, so that you may spend it for those who earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. He gives you social position, so that you may have a vantage-ground for the lever of your moral influence. He gives you life itself, so that you may yield it back in His service, year by year and day by day.

Election means choice. God does call us out, and set us apart, and make us to differ one from another. But here is part of the reason of His mysterious choice. He elects

The Charge of God's Elect

us, just as a captain picks out soldiers for some special service. He clothes and equips us for some special duty. He arms us against some special foe. He enriches us for some special charity. By the discipline of life He trains us to fulfil our appointed calling. So it was with that apostle concerning whom the Lord said: "He is a vessel of election unto Me, to bear My name before the nations, and I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake." St. Paul had great gifts already, but he must be subdued by great sorrows until he became a vessel purified and fit for the Master's use. Each vessel of election is shaped out of mortal clay by the Divine Hand, and tempered and annealed in the furnace of suffering, to the end that it may fulfil the uses of a cup and carry living water to souls that perish with thirst. God has chosen us, in order that we may serve.

This doctrine of election appears like a

The Charge of God's Elect

tattered banner which has come through scores of fights until, at last, battle-stained and torn and faded, it is carried into a cathedral and hung over the altar—where strife ends and sacrifice begins.

The Charge of God's Elect

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XIX

THE SIN OF CONTEMPT

Everyone is sensitive to contempt. It is hard to forgive those supercilious persons who look down upon you scornfully and sometimes—as the saying goes—treat you like so much dirt under their feet. Even toleration may proceed from mere disdain. There was true Roman arrogance about Gallio, when he refused to trouble himself with foreigners wrangling over their wretched superstitions :

Whether ye follow Priapus or Paul,
I care for none of these things.

This is the real reason why we so often remember a slight long after we have forgotten an injury. Probably nothing has rankled in British recollection of the War like the Kaiser's sneer at our contemptible

The Sin of Contempt

little army. Yet, on the other hand, everybody is sometimes provoked into becoming scornful. It is difficult indeed not to feel contempt when you are brought face to face with certain kinds of baseness—like treachery or ingratitude—and difficult not to show that you despise men who are guilty of sins like these. Nevertheless, contempt at bottom is essentially unchristian. When we meditate on some of its examples and manifestations, we begin to understand that it proceeds from a belief in the worthlessness of mankind. There are people who look at their fellow-beings with the eyes of Timon, and discern only the mean motives, the smug pretensions, the pompous dulness, the ignoble ambitions, the selfish cruelties, which disfigure human nature. Who can help despising creatures so abject and so degraded, so full of vile wants and futile passions and absurd conceit, as they struggle through their brief years of fretfulness and folly? Dean Swift

The Sin of Contempt

represents the terrible outcome of this dark, embittered spirit, which he poured out in *Gulliver's Travels*. Before the book ends its savage scorn grows intolerable. We recoil from writers, however gifted, who hold men to be mostly fools or, as Swift would imply, mere brutes in disguise. Sarcasm is the proper dialect to express such a contempt for humanity. Carlyle himself declared sarcasm to be the language of the devil, and provoked the retort that one might almost say it was Carlyle's mother-tongue. Voltaire, again, incarnated that sneering temper which contradicts the Gospel. Even so fine a critic as Matthew Arnold marred much of his work by its tone of insolent mockery. The typical modern Antichrist is Mephistopheles—and we may recognize him by his satanic sneer.

The Divine Person Who meets us in the New Testament has this supreme characteristic, that He is utterly innocent of scornfulness. He humbled Himself, and He

The Sin of Contempt

emptied Himself, yet it was without a stain of condescension. Concerning the King of Love we read that His face was wet with weeping, and we can be confident, though we have no record, that He smiled on the children when He gathered them into His arms. But always His pure eyes shone with immortal tenderness and compassion. Even in His anger and His grief at the hardness of men's hearts, there was no contempt. He lived despised and rejected; but He Himself never despised and never rejected the meanest human creature. It would be like blasphemy to imagine a sneer on the countenance of the Son of Man. Again and again He warned His disciples against the wickedness of disdain. Take heed, He said with solemn emphasis, and beware of covetousness—the lust for possessions. Take heed that ye do not your alms before men—beware of self-display. But above all, take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones—beware of cherishing contempt

The Sin of Contempt

for any man or woman or child. For this is the deadly leaven of the Pharisees, the sin of the superior person. Not a few Christians have stumbled at the stern sentences in the Sermon on the Mount with which our Lord condemned passionate anger expressed in words of scorn. But "Raca," as a wise expositor points out, implies contempt for a man's head: it means "you idiot"; while the term rendered "fool" carries contempt for a man's heart and character: it means "you scoundrel." And the doom which Christ pronounced against this inhuman scorn reveals His own burning abhorrence of such a sin.

Now the temptation to cherish contempt, which is the sin of the superior person, besets people of every age and condition of life. Sometimes it can take odd shapes and borrow strange disguises. One by-product of the War appears to-day in the supercilious fashion in which so many

The Sin of Contempt

young men and maidens have come to regard their elders. So again, class pride is a hateful spirit from which no class or rank is exempt. We see it infecting socialists as well as capitalists and professors and peers. Let us be honest, and confess that we are all inclined to feel secretly disdainful of those persons whom we consider to be our inferiors—because, forsooth, they have missed some of those gifts and opportunities which in His inscrutable will God bestowed upon us. A decent Christian to-day will shrink from the vulgarity of despising poor men who are badly off. Yet do we never look down upon half-educated folk, with their crude taste and cheap knowledge and narrow horizon? History, however, seems to prove—as James Spedding once remarked—that “God was never particular about giving His favourite children a good education.” God, at any rate, shows no preference for University men. In His eyes respect of persons is equally sinful, whether we base

The Sin of Contempt

it on culture or on hard cash. "What are the differences of our endowments to Him from Whom we all come and to Whom we all return?" Pride of race, again, is harder to eradicate, inasmuch as the roots of this pride lie deep among our inherited instincts and subconscious antipathies. Yet every Christian believes that the Divine love is colour-blind to racial distinctions; while in the elemental human experiences we admit that there is no difference left between the white soldier and Gunga Din. Still more subtle and more deadly is "grace pride," as a quaint old preacher called it—the self-importance of the Pharisee who contrasts himself with other religious men less earnest in piety and less strict in conduct. This is the temptation which lies in wait round the doors of spiritual retreats and conventions and conferences, and dogs the footsteps of the ardent seeker after God. How can such a one escape the consciousness that he has reached a higher level

The Sin of Contempt

than ordinary believers? How is he to help looking down disparagingly upon commonplace Christians, who seem so inferior in their enlightenment and consecration and joy? On this matter we venture to make two affirmations. First, only the Holy Spirit can create genuine saints. Secondly, nothing but the secret humiliations of God's inward discipline can save a saint from perverting into that dreadful caricature of holiness—a spiritual Brahmin. Dr. Alexander Francis has recorded how while he was resident in Russia a certain "social worker" from Chicago begged to be introduced to Tolstoi. At their interview the American described his methods of rescue work in the slums of that wicked city: "We go down to the drunkards and harlots and try to pull them up to the rock on which we stand." And then, continues Dr. Francis, "the storm that I had seen gathering burst upon the astonished man. 'You miserable creature,' said Tolstoi, more

The Sin of Contempt

in sorrow than in anger, 'do you know that your heart is full of Pharisaic pride, and that it was upon such sins of the spirit and not on sins of the flesh that He whom you call Lord and Master poured the vials of His wrath? Will no one organize a mission of drunkards and harlots to save the souls of the clergy and social workers who, by their secret sins of swelling pride and petty meanness, by their bitter jealousies and narrow sectarianism, are kept out of the Kingdom into which the open sinners enter, saved as by fire, yet saved by the grace of Christ in them, manifesting itself in the humility, the charity, and the self-loathing of their hearts.' "

By strange and devious paths men may climb into the seat of the scornful ; but to sit in that seat is to betray and deny Jesus Christ. Because the Redeemer of mankind recognizes the preciousness of each humblest human soul. He discerns the possibilities latent in that soul, however deeply it be

The Sin of Contempt

corrupted and defiled. On that soul He has lavished His own unutterable affection. For the sake of that soul He did not disdain to die. And therefore He requires His disciples to look at men with His eyes, to measure them by His standard, to feel for them with something of His ardour. Outwardly, indeed, they may appear contemptible creatures—mentally deficient, or morally and physically degraded, or spiritually deaf and blind. Nevertheless, “as the brothers of Christ, as belonging to His sacred kind, as the objects of His love in life and death, they must be dear to all to whom He is dear. And those who would for a moment know His heart and understand His life must begin by thinking of the whole race of man, and of each member of the race, with awful reverence and hope.”

Contempt is the concentrated essence of Antichrist. The Church has room in its ranks for almost anybody except a cynic. But we who are Christ's dare not despise

The Sin of Contempt

any man, nor despair of any man. To do so would be to blaspheme that Holy Name by which we are called. And in so far as our Lord makes us worthy to co-operate with Him in His dealing with human souls, we shall fulfil our service humbly and pitifully and with endless patience—like the patience with which an artist gently detaches the grime that has obscured and defaced some rare fresco in an old cathedral. Some may ask scornfully “Is it worth while?” But Christ has certified us by His Cross and Passion that each single sinner is infinitely worth while. Nothing can redeem us from contempt, nothing can inspire us with the scorn of scorn, except the love of His love.

XX

MUCH SERVING

Never before in the history of the Church has it appeared so active as it appears to-day. At home and abroad we find ardent Christians preoccupied with the business of doing good. Yet one question recurs insistently : is all this eager enterprise for Christ succeeding as it ought to succeed ? Why do our best efforts again and again prove ineffectual ? Why do they sometimes sink into mechanical routine, which becomes a barrenness and a bondage ? Our Lord has called us into His service, which is perfect freedom ; but too often we turn it into a yoke which is not easy and a burden which is not light.

Most active Christians are enlisted in this or that religious organization. Now we all admit that a certain amount of organization

Much Serving

is of course necessary—a necessary evil ; yet certain branches and departments of it assuredly seem more evil and less necessary. Because Divine results do not depend upon elaborate human apparatus. Indeed, the grace of God shows a curious preference for methods that are simple and channels that are unexpected. Again and again in the Church's history, when costly aqueducts crumble down and run dry, we see *in the wilderness waters break out and streams in the desert*. For practical purposes, however, Christians are compelled to organize. We can hardly help being entangled in a network of societies and institutions. We are careful and anxious over all manner of claims and causes. Many of us dissipate and distract our souls at conferences and committees without end. We grow jaded in spirit, we lose our inward freshness and glee and zest, because we are cumbered with much serving.

Numbers of earnest people to-day make a kind of fetish of their religious and philan-

Much Serving

thropic activity. They are feverishly busy at the task of improving the world, and they admire themselves because they feel that they are doing so much. Persons of this type must have suggested to Swedenborg a grim episode in his vision of hell ; he describes how in hell he saw one region where everybody was incessantly employed in trying to make everybody else virtuous. We discover by mournful experience that, when men combine in Christian service, they do not thereby escape from vulgar temptations and ambitions. There appear to be special devils which haunt conventions and committee-rooms. The officials of religious societies can develop all the vices of bureaucrats. Indeed, religious work itself is a sphere in which love of power, and vanity, and gadding about, and excitement, and self-importance can find full scope in the path of duty. " Work," as a wise man wrote, " is the Dagon of to-day. Instead of being a witness to our faith in the God

Much Serving

in Whose name we do it, it is too often a vast monument of our disbelief in His ability to do without us."

There was an evangelistic hymn once popular which affirmed that "doing is a deadly thing, doing ends in death." Now the truth at the back of those words is a truth which applies not only to the unconverted but to every Christian who grows absorbed in the sacred task of serving his fellow-men. Salvation comes by faith, not by works. That root-principle holds good in regard to the collective activities of the Church, as well as for each single penitent soul. The supreme business of the redeemed Church is not work, but worship—not philanthropy, but adoration—not "doing things," but bearing thankful, exultant witness to what Christ Himself has done and is doing eternally. Those mighty promises and warnings and commandments in the Gospels which apply to the individual disciple apply also to the Christian com-

Much Serving

munity. Christ forbids His Church to take anxious thought for its food, or its raiment, or its revenue, or its fortunes in days to come. The Church as a whole must cease to trouble about the morrow, or to fret and worry concerning all those things which the Gentiles seek after. The Church must learn to live on the lily and sparrow footing, and must be free from carefulness about money, and must labour to lay up not endowments on earth but treasure in heaven.

As a wise man warns us, "It is one of the paradoxes of Christianity that, though it makes the outward conditions of human society happy and healthy, it does not aim directly at these objects." "The advance of civilization is in truth a sort of by-product of Christianity, not its chief aim." But history proves that "this progress is most stable and genuine when it is a by-product of lofty and unworldly idealism." So the Church will conquer and transform the world at last by daring to be utterly unworldly.

Much Serving

The Church can overcome evil with good, when it has faith to oppose evil with sheer goodness and with nothing else at all.

One characteristic monument of the Reformation was known as the Heidelberg Catechism. When we study that Catechism, it is startling to find the whole content of Christian ethics comprised under the heading of "Gratitude." The great Reformers realized vividly that our good works are powerless and lifeless and worthless, unless they proceed naturally and spontaneously from a passion of thankfulness for what Christ has done for us and for all men. Our religious activities have small value, except in so far as they form a practical *Te Deum* for the blessings of redemption. In the *Te Deum* itself you do not hear one syllable about what people now call Christian work. But the soul from which virtue goes out to help and heal others is a soul overflowing continually with wonder, love, and praise. Because far beyond and above all

Much Serving

that we may do for any person is that which we may be to that person. The one thing indispensable for effectual service of Christ is what we can never learn, unless we learn it by sitting at His feet.

Therein lies the secret which makes a humble saint so potent for the highest good. For it is true of a saint that "the least of his words and actions may be of more vital effect in the world than the life's labour of any of the herd of benevolent people who are busied about much serving." Our Lord said concerning His chosen friends, "For their sakes I sanctify, I consecrate, Myself." Even when we set apart all that was solitary and unique in His self-consecration—all that He alone could achieve and achieve once for all—those solemn words come home to every disciple: "For their sakes I consecrate Myself." We may consecrate our time and energy to Christian service, we may consecrate our gifts: do we consecrate our inmost selves? There is nothing else

Much Serving

on earth like the power of personal holiness over the lives which it touches—no influence so potent, so penetrating, so inexhaustible. “Those who set their affection on things above make this world a better place simply by being in it.” When you watch, you generally discover that the salt and light and leaven in any society for doing good proceed from some pure and humble characters who have been redeemed from self-seeking.✓

Half of our Christian activity has this canker at its root—that even in doing Christ’s work we are not delivered from self-regard. We are still concerned about our own importance, our own reputation. An observer who stood outside the Church once remarked that “a man can do a great deal of good in the world, if only he does not care who gets the credit for it.”✓ Do we never hanker after credit for our personal toil and patience and sacrifice? Are we never jealous when our fellow-labourers obtain recognition which we think we

Much Serving

deserve, and receive honour which we feel ought in fairness to fall to our share? The Buddhist devotee is continually striving to "acquire merit." Not a few zealous Christians seem to feel that by their works of faith and labours of love they are somehow acquiring merit. But He Who knows man's bias to self-flattery warns us against this deadly snare. A modern teacher has paraphrased our Lord's stern warning: "Performance of duty is no merit. Do, faithfully and punctiliously, all that God commands thee to do; and after thou hast achieved that which thou well knowest none save thyself has ever achieved, thou art nevertheless an unprofitable servant. Thou hast not exceeded thy duty. Nay, if thou indeed believe that thou hast performed thy whole duty, thou art judged already—for thou hast judged thyself."

In a few brief years we shall have passed beyond caring about the dispraise or misjudgment of men. After a little while

Much Serving

prophecies will fail and tongues will cease and knowledge will vanish away, and our institutions and organizations will appear like wrecks in a dissolving dream. But One Presence will never vanish. One Love we can never lose. That good part, which by God's grace belongs to humble souls already, is so good, because in God's mercy it shall never be taken away.

XXI

LOVE'S REWARD

This sentence in ancient prophecy, *His reward is with him, and his work before him*, arrests us by its unusual phrasing. If the prophet had written "His work is with him, and his reward before him," the meaning would be simple. For we all know by daily experience that our work is with us, often too much with us. And we all anticipate, sooner or later, some kind of payment for our toil: we look forward to future compensation for this present weariness, we trust that if we sow in tears we shall reap in joy. The words, as they stand, however, appear like a paradox. Yet paradox is no uncommon form to express the secrets of God. Perhaps every deep spiritual truth involves in itself a reconciliation of opposites, a harmony of apparent

Love's Reward

contradictions. And so, without attempting to exhaust the meaning of these words or to go behind their translation, we may take them as suggesting two neglected aspects of Christian service—its recompense, which is always present ; and its scope and horizon, which go on widening and expanding for ever.

Concerning all faithful servants, is it not a faithful saying that their reward is with them, in the daily wages of fidelity ? Even the children of this world inherit the blessing which goes hand in hand with honest toil. For there is a zest in struggle, an ardour in exertion, a glow in achievement, belonging to all healthy human activity. The scholar, who scorns delights and lives laborious days ; the athlete, who steadily trains himself to excel ; the explorer, who adventures across uncharted deserts ; the craftsman, who strives to outstrip his rivals in workmanship—each discovers in a real sense that his reward is with him. The man

Love's Reward

who carries a hard business well through finds a joy in battling with the very hardships which he conquers, apart from any other prize.

Human nature yields these recompenses of its own ; but in deeper and truer fashion Christ's disciples realize that their reward is with them. People sometimes ask cynically, " Does it pay to be a Christian ? " Before we answer, we must ask the further question, " In what kind of coinage are you reckoning payment ? " Our Lord warns His servants, *Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.* Yet verily, they have their reward. When we try to take stock of the careers of devoted disciples it does not always appear that visible success is with them. Often Christ has claimed them for service which was passive rather than active ; often they are elected not to achieve but only to endure. Moreover, it is part of the mystery of the kingdom of God that His servants' labour bears hidden fruit and its

Love's Reward

results reach far beyond our sight. Nevertheless, the beatitudes of Jesus are all spoken in the present tense ; and to loyal souls those beatitudes are constantly coming true. The Holy Grail itself is no mere vision to watch for : it is a cup of daily experience, and lettered round its rim we can spell the legend, *O taste and see how gracious the Lord is*. Even here and now, in this troublesome, workaday world, each humble, true-hearted Christian does taste and does see.

Some of us, for instance, have tried to obey our Lord's great unrepealed command, *Feed My lambs*. We have given ourselves to the service of Christ's little ones. And we have proved how that service can be itself a sacrament as well ; because it reveals the Real Presence, and it becomes a channel of Divine grace to our own souls. Many a Sunday-school teacher will confess thankfully, " It was good for me to be there, in that dingy class-room. For there,

Love's Reward

without my knowing it, were built three tabernacles—one for me, and one for the children, and one for Him Who is the Friend of all children and the Teacher of all teachers.”

Concerning all Christ's commandments it comes true that *in keeping of them*, in the act and article of our obedience, *there is great reward*. The men who quietly renounce worldly ambitions for the sake of doing good, the men who steadily refuse to get rich at the expense of honesty and honour, the men who suffer reproach and loss for their loyalty to some unpopular cause which is the cause of conscience—their reward is with them. Deep in their own spirits they inherit that peace which passeth all understanding and that love which passeth all knowledge.

Sometimes we refresh our fortitude by reading lives of the saints and heroes and martyrs of faith. But no one writes any history of the hidden saints, and the nameless

Love's Reward

heroes, and those who are martyrs by the pang without the palm. God's chosen prophets and apostles in the world to-day disdain to advertise themselves, and they win scant notice in the newspapers. Those Christians, for example, who serve as pioneers of the Gospel in distant lands are seldom permitted to gain any shining outward success, or to reap golden harvests from their patient sowing. Yet, though they wear out their lives at some lonely mission-station, we dare not pity them. We may pray for them, we may reverence them ; but at least we will not insult them with pity. Surely they have their reward—that reward which Thomas Aquinas summed up when he said : *Non aliam mercedem, Domine, nisi Te*—"Grant me, O Lord, no other recompense except Thyself." Obscure and unpraised among men, they still have Christ Himself, everywhere and always, Christ Himself their all-sufficient, everlasting Portion, to make up to them even here and

Love's Reward

now for all they suffer and surrender, all they lose and let go and leave behind for His Name's sake.

To the whole fellowship of companions in the faith and patience of Jesus Christ, this great promise is fulfilled. Our reward is with us, if only we be patient and faithful. Sometimes, indeed, we begin to doubt it, when we try to walk by sight and not by faith. Times come in the experience of every believer when he is tempted to ask his own soul, half bitterly, half wearily, what after all remains for him amid life's disappointments and bereavements and failures, as his pulses slacken and his powers decay. Until Christ's own voice makes inward answer: "Behold, I am thy Youth; I am thy Health; I am thy Opportunity; I am thy Success, and thy Consolation; I am thy Friend, and thy Shield, and thy exceeding great Reward: all thy fresh springs are in Me."

Not less commanding is the corresponding

Love's Reward

truth : *his work is before him*. Every real student finds that saying verified in the course of his studies. Because the more he learns, the more conscious he grows of his ignorance, and the more aware he becomes of vast provinces and kingdoms of knowledge waiting to be explored and possessed. This is why great scholars are generally so humble-minded. A little learning is a dangerous thing when it is not yet sensible of its own narrow limits. But the lad who has "finished" school is just commencing his proper education. At the end of a long life the wisest man will confess that he has only begun to find out how much there still remains for him to learn.

If this principle comes home to students in the university of the world, much more is it fulfilled in the experience of a Christian. His work is perpetually before him : and it always must be so, from the nature of his reward. The Jewish rabbis used to say that every duty accomplished is rewarded

Love's Reward

by a wider duty to perform. And so part of the prize which recompenses our service of Christ is the power and the opportunity to serve Him better still. Our Lord cheered His apostle lying in captivity with this strange promise: "As thou hast testified concerning Me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." The reward for work done is more work and sterner work to do. And the wages of going on in that work mean that we become more and more entangled in the sacred task, and more fascinated by its interests, and more sensitive to its claims. To His veteran disciples the service of Christ grows more absorbing and more exacting year by year. They who enter into the secrets of that service perceive how, as God's enterprise advances, it must correspondingly expand. Thus the oldest missionaries discern most clearly what great things the propaganda of faith entails and demands. While, after so many centuries of labour and intercession and sacrifice,

Love's Reward

the Church to-day confesses more ardently than ever that its work lies before it, not behind.

Some of us can recollect how timidly we first set prentice hands to further Christ's cause in the town where we were living. The endeavour has gone on, costing toil and trouble far beyond what we reckoned at the outset. But we have proved also that our reward is with us. An old Spanish proverb declares, "God does not pay on Saturdays." No—He pays on every day of the week, and in every hour of the day. Throughout our drudgery for the Lord and His people, we have had recompense unspeakable—even Christ Himself. We have received in our own souls personal blessings which could reach us by no other channel. And we discover also that this work is before us still. God is sealing His acceptance of our poor service in the past, by opening doors of wider and harder service for us to render Him in the future. And so

Love's Reward

our comrades and companions hear us singing :

Grow old along with me !

The best is yet to be,

The last of life, for which the first was made.

Our work will be before us eternally. Those who live as fellow-labourers with their Lord on earth may humbly hope for some share in the endless activities of heaven. The servant who is faithful over a few things here shall be made ruler over many things at last : and that surely means that he shall enter on a career of more joyful, because more strenuous and more sacrificial service. Sometimes Christians are reproached for having respect to the recompense of their reward hereafter. We are told that even to think about heaven is selfish. And it is true, alas ! that some preachers cheapen and degrade paradise by depicting it as a kind of bait. But such a picture does despite to the very nature and quality of our spiritual recompense. For

Love's Reward

how does Christ reward a man for lofty self-forgetfulness? By enabling that man to forget himself continually, more and more : *that* is the reward. So our Christian hope, which maketh not ashamed, is the hope that God's grace will make us in the end what we have been all our lives praying and striving to become : it is the hope that even we shall be made altogether humble and entirely generous and perfectly unselfish at last.

Some of our dreams about heaven may be too gaudy, too insipid. Perhaps it is true that " we need a widened and invigorated ideal of the spiritual universe through which we may one day wander." Certainly to Christians the life of the world to come appears not as a passive felicity, but rather as " the prolongation of all generous energies, the unison of all high desires." It doth not enter into our hearts to conceive what God hath prepared for them that love Him, in that land where repose and toil are no

Love's Reward

longer severed—where *His servants shall serve Him*, in sinless, tireless, transfigured labour ; and where *they shall see His face*, whose present vision is already the first-fruits of their reward.

XXII

THE TYRANNY OF TOOLS

An obscure verse in the book of Habakkuk denounces those who *sacrifice unto their net and burn incense unto their drag*. Apparently the prophet has come face to face with some vast heathen power, a despotism which outrages humanity. It sweeps whole nations into its net, and then empties it and fills it again and again. It exults in its immense cruelty, and worships the very instruments of its success. History supplies some parallels which throw light on the prophet's meaning. Thus, for instance, after Napoleon had trampled over Europe, he made a cult of his invincible *grande armée*. In similar fashion the tyrants of Russia to-day extol to the skies their ruthless Red Police.

The Tyranny of Tools

When we ponder the matter more closely, however, we recognize a deep underlying truth which affects all classes in all departments of life. Men are always tempted to exalt the apparatus they employ. Half-unconsciously they laud and magnify their tools. For two or three generations the world has been dazzled and fascinated and obsessed by the march of mechanical discovery. We feel that we have thereby attained far greater mastery over the forces of nature: we hardly realize that in point of fact the forces of nature have also gained far greater mastery over us. More than fifty years ago Samuel Butler published his *Erewhon*—that curious apocalypse in which he predicted the time when mankind would become enslaved by the machines which they had themselves invented. We are at length beginning dimly to appreciate Butler's forecast. Again and again we listen to fresh warnings from expert observers that war in future will be waged mainly by

The Tyranny of Tools

means of machinery. It is not long since Sir Oliver Lodge gave us a lurid picture of tanks and submarines and aeroplanes, carrying no pilots but directed by distant wireless operators, and laden wholly with high explosives or poison-gas or disease-germs. The imagination shudders at such a vision of wholesale slaughter. Yet there are corresponding dilemmas which confront us even in the progressive arts of peace. A single instance may serve for illustration. In the United States to-day probably no workmen enjoy shorter hours and larger wages and better conditions than those engaged in the manufacture of Ford cars : yet complaints increase that these very men are tending to become more and more like cogs in an immense and complicated mechanism. How to avert the peril of degrading human beings into " Robots " remains an unsolved problem in modern mass production.

Moreover, in ways subtler and more far-

The Tyranny of Tools

reaching than these, we discover how balefully an organization can react upon the individuals whom it embraces and controls. Quite apart from current theories about herd-psychology, it is notorious in practical experience how easily any official may sink into a mere appendage of his society—how a tutor gets merged in his college routine, how a parson becomes possessed and swallowed up by his Church, while a monk will confess with pride that his entire self is absorbed into his order. The complex civilization under which we have to live inclines ordinary men to bow down before its institutions. Many people cherish a pathetic faith in the saving virtue of public boards and councils and civic apparatus. Legislators worship the efficacy of Acts of Parliament. Civil servants make a fetish of their bureaucracy. And at the heart of the Socialist creed lies a rooted assumption that you can cure the ills of human life by means of some elaborate mechanism of

The Tyranny of Tools

rules and restraints. Yet one fatal obstacle persists: in a world like this and for creatures such as we are, the Socialist system, if it could ever be enforced, would spell slavery.

From a different point of view we may recognize how this principle applies to the worship of books as books, which is fashionable in certain quarters. Collectors pay outlandish prices for first editions. Publishers issue sumptuous and costly reprints of great authors, and of authors who are less than great. Yet concerning printed volumes, as well as concerning all other things made by hands, it is true that the spirit quickeneth, while the flesh profiteth nothing. Books, after all, are only means to an end. "A good book," said Milton, "is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." But unless that life be transfused into your own being, the library which you are so proud to exhibit

The Tyranny of Tools

might as well be a museum of fossils or a collection of postage-stamps. Moreover, this comes to pass even in regard to the Bible. The worst peril of Bibliolatry is that we may worship the letter of revelation in such a way as to miss the spirit. Holy Scripture is meant to be nothing less than a sacrament of the living God to those who read it. Yet in that sacrament the outward and visible sign avails little, unless it becomes a vehicle of inward and spiritual grace. Biblical scholarship and criticism and comment are precious things, which have their proper place and value. But we dare not exalt them as though in themselves they contain or convey the vital substance of the Gospel. At best they can be only means to an end. The most accomplished scholar who has no inward humility, no sense of sin, no hunger after holiness, will miss his way in the Bible far more blindly than some poor old woman, who spells out her daily portion of Psalm or parable or promise, but

The Tyranny of Tools

who nevertheless in those ancient words hears God Himself speaking clearly to her soul.

A wise teacher has declared that it is of the essence of sin for a Christian to regard things as though they could be more sacred than persons, and to degrade persons into mere instruments for producing or promoting things. Church history is blotted and stained with records of this spiritual wickedness, in high places as well as low. It is such a perversion of real values which persuades Christians to subordinate the end to the means. Yet we do this when we exalt our theology and insist upon our definitions, in place of adoring God Himself. We do this when we lose sight of Christ, in our concern for ecclesiastical apparatus and machinery. We do this when we magnify our favourite methods of Christian service, rather than the Redeemer for Whom they exist. Year by year, as often as May comes round, generous friends of religious

The Tyranny of Tools

societies assemble in London to praise the institutions which they support ; but while they are applauding the orators at these annual festivals, a warning voice will sometimes whisper : *They sacrifice unto their net and burn incense unto their drag.* Not seldom they go on venerating consecrated methods and machinery which are fossilized and out of date ; for that kind of relic-worship can flourish among the most fervent Protestants. But whenever any Christian institution is treated as existing for its own sake, it turns into a snare and hindrance instead of a blessing. In the Church itself, experience proves how we may emphasize the construction of sheep-folds and the appointment of pastors for Christ's flock, until we forget the One Shepherd and Bishop of souls. After all has been said, the officials and organizations and sacraments of the Church can never be anything better than means to an end—and their sole end is Christ Himself.

The Tyranny of Tools

To accept this as a spiritual axiom is not to deny that ecclesiastical organizations are natural and necessary. That Christian faith should take outward form is inevitable. Nay, it is owing in no small degree to its organization that Christianity fills the place which it does fill in the world. The annals of Christendom bear witness indeed that the Church "has added a new chapter to the science of politics; it has passed through every change of form which a State can know: it has been democratical, aristocratical; it has even made some essays towards constitutional monarchy; and it has furnished the most majestic and scientific tyranny of which history makes mention." In different countries and centuries Christians have paid exaggerated homage to this or that form of Church order. Multitudes of devout men and women still sacrifice their substance and burn costly incense in honour of some mediæval net. Yet, when they point to their stately cathedrals, we

The Tyranny of Tools

remember how Jesus Christ stood in front of that ancient temple which was the holiest shrine on earth, and declared that out of the very stones of the street God is able to raise up living saints and prophets for Himself. To-day, as of old, He calls us to become successors of those apostles who, when they heard His voice, *forsook their nets* to follow Him—and He made them fishers of men.

XXIII

THE BRANDS OF THE LORD JESUS

Everyone knows the characteristic legend concerning Francis of Assisi, which tells how on his hands and feet and side he bore mysterious crucifixion-marks, in token of his spiritual conformity to the Crucified. When, however, St. Paul wrote: *From henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear branded in my body the marks of Jesus*, the apostle was not thinking about any supernatural stigmata. He was remembering things much simpler and more commonplace. Those scars where the stones cut when they pelted him at Lystra, and those seams where the rods bit when they scourged him at Philippi, those hands horny with toil, and those eyes dim with watching, and that weather-beaten face which braved

The Brands of the Lord Jesus

so many storms in his Master's service—it is marks like these that he calls to mind. For the words written of George Fox were still more true of St. Paul: "Then he grew weakly, being troubled with pains and aches, having had many sore and long travels, beatings, and hard imprisonments." Soldiers who were crippled in the Great War can feel to-day that they carry in their bodies the seal of their sacrifice for England. And so it was these missionary marks, the tokens and proofs of his apostleship, which rose up before St. Paul when he wrote: "I bear branded in my body the marks of Jesus." Nevertheless, there remains a deep spiritual sense in which the like good confession ought to be possible for every Christian. And we shall understand it, when we consider how a brand implies at least three things—ownership, advertisement, and genuineness.

A brand implies *ownership*. For this reason farmers brand their sheep, and

The Brands of the Lord Jesus

ranchmen brand their cattle. Within living memory negroes in America were branded by their owners as slaves. The ancient Hebrew law provided that in certain cases a bondsman should have his ear nailed to the doorpost, to show that he was henceforth his master's property for life. In like manner, to bear the brands of Jesus Christ means to have Him for our Owner and Possessor ; it means to belong to Him in body and soul and spirit ; it means to be yielded to Him as those that are alive from the dead. In the New Testament the word "servant" is practically equivalent to "slave" ; and St. Paul's proudest title was "an apostle, and a slave of Jesus Christ."

Moreover, this idea of ownership helps us to understand why the apostle could say : "Henceforth let no man trouble me." Because a slave, just by reason of his slavery, is curiously emancipated from half the anxieties which beset people who belong to themselves or to one another. A slave

The Brands of the Lord Jesus

takes no thought for his life, what he shall eat ; nor yet for his body, what he shall put on. His master finds him his food and raiment, and sets him his work ; and so long as he satisfies his master, he need care little for other men's praise or blame. And so slavery, by a kind of paradox, brings with it also detachment and freedom—freedom from the cares of this world and from the deceitfulness of riches. A strange peace settles into the soul of the man who can say quietly : “ Whether I live, I live unto the Lord ; or whether I die, I die unto the Lord ; living therefore, or dying, I am the Lord's.”

Again, a brand implies *advertisement*. We can instantly pick out a porter at the railway station, or a policeman in the street ; we recognize at a glance the man in khaki who is serving his country. Each of them bears it on his body. And ought there not also to be something about a Christian which shows plainly Whose he is and Whom

The Brands of the Lord Jesus

he serves? We may admit this, without advocating any special religious garments or badges, without defending "these offensively celestial uniforms," as Ruskin once called them. Surely the brands of Jesus Christ pierce deeper than a costume. And surely, even in the workaday world, we have sometimes met people who carry about with them the very stamp and signature of goodness. In their look and bearing and gesture we have recognized a subtle, indescribable expression—a seal of innocence and tranquillity—which declares plainly that they are in the world, but not of it. They never talk cant, and yet their speech betrayeth them. Even now the promise comes true, "His Name shall be written in their foreheads"; and when we watch such a one, we may sometimes see his face as it had been the face of an angel.

To advertise our religion is a grave and sacred responsibility. Yet none of us can help doing it: we must, whether we will

The Brands of the Lord Jesus

or no. A man's belief or his misbelief, his faith or his infidelity, is the greatest fact about him : it rings in his voice and beams in his smile and radiates from his whole personality. Everybody, in spite of himself, is a living sermon for evil or for good. And the worst perversions of the Gospel arise out of the lives of those Christians who, instead of being its advertisement, become its libel and its caricature. When Père Besson, the French Dominican, went to preach to his countrymen who were in Italy, the Italians themselves flocked to hear him, because they said his face was worth many sermons. Two young Italian soldiers were standing at the edge of the crowd round his pulpit, almost out of reach of the voice which was speaking to them in a strange tongue ; and one said to his fellow, " Look at that man : he is a speaking crucifix ! " When we have grace to preach like that, we shall find fewer deaf children sitting in the market-place.

The Brands of the Lord Jesus

Once more, a brand implies *genuineness*. Like the trade-mark which guarantees that an article comes from the right factory ; or like the hall-mark which proves that your spoons are silver and not Britannia metal. Concerning St. Paul, we may say that he was hall-marked with Jesus Christ. His faith was quite beyond debate or dispute. Henceforth let no man trouble him about his orthodoxy: he was endorsed with the very autograph of his Master. And, after all, there is no surer and safer evidence of a genuine Christian than this—that the man reminds us of Christ ; he walks even as Christ walked ; his presence is felt at times like the presence of Christ Himself. People will often wrangle about what they call the notes of the Church, the signs and proofs by which we may distinguish the authentic Communion of the faithful from its spurious imitations. The decisive notes of the Holy Catholic Church must be moral and spiritual tokens. Wherever we meet with a com-

The Brands of the Lord Jesus

pany of Christian men and women who are so tender-hearted, so self-forgetful, so humble, so pure, so brave, that they put us irresistibly in mind of their Saviour—because they bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, and the life also of Jesus is manifested in their mortal flesh—then, though we may dislike some points in their order and their discipline, and we may shrink from some clauses in their creed, yet henceforth let no man trouble us with criticisms and objections : in that fellowship we are conscious of nothing except the wound-prints of Jesus Christ Himself.

XXIV

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Each new year is like a new-born child, which brings hope with it and forward-looking thoughts. On the dim threshold of the future we pause and peer into its shadows with expectancy which defies all the logic of experience. In spite of disillusion and disappointment we cannot help watching wistfully, with eager eyes, when the seals are broken and a fresh chapter begins in the mysterious book of human history. Nothing in man's nature is more prophetic than this sacred, unquenchable instinct which commands him to hope.

The prophetic soul of the wide world to-day is seething with strange expectations. There are experts, for example, who predict that a vast revival in trade and commerce is

Great Expectations

close at hand. Yet that would be a mere trifle, compared with what some masters of physical science are not afraid to forecast. These men believe that they have reached the brink of immense discoveries; they are confidently groping after keys to unlock the latent energy of the atom and to harness the secret forces of the universe into the service of man. Again, there are multitudes of common people at home and abroad, in the East as well as the West, who look eagerly for some material millennium as they listen to voices that announce approaching upheavals of society. A Christian, indeed, will discount the value of some of these promises. He may doubt, for instance, whether the latest apostles of revolt are not blind to spiritual realities. It is indeed curious to observe how millenniums can change their colour. There was a time in Europe, nearly eighty years ago, when revolution seemed written in fire across the sky. In that stormy era the

Great Expectations

followers of Kossuth and Mazzini marched against tyranny like crusaders under the banner of freedom. Liberty then seemed worth fighting and dying for. Indeed, so profound a judge as Lord Acton has put on record his verdict that "achieved liberty is the one ethical result that rests on the converging and combined conditions of advancing civilization." Yet if Lord Acton were alive to-day, would he pronounce that real liberty has been advancing of late—or receding—in countries like Italy, or Spain, or Russia, or even the United States? Our generation has swerved aside into other tracks in quest of a different goal. But is man's new expectation any nobler than the old, or any nearer to the mind of Christ? Take, for instance, the craving after material welfare. The Labour Press in England derides and denounces people who are "thoroughly comfortable." Too many church-goers fall under that condemnation, and we must confess, not without shame, that to be

Great Expectations

thoroughly comfortable is very far from the Christian ideal. If the Cross teaches us anything, it warns us solemnly that we cannot serve God and comfort. But just on that account, Christians dare not put faith in any social reconstruction which has no loftier watchword than the greatest comfort for the greatest number.

The Church of Jesus Christ is the home of unspeakable expectation. In primitive days His disciples endured and underwent and overcame in the mighty hope of their Lord's appearing. And though time has transformed the outward aspect of that advent, faithful souls have never ceased to murmur the affirmation: "We believe that Thou shalt come." Whenever lamps burn low in the Church, and love waxes cold, and watchers slumber while the Bridegroom tarries, the Restorer and Sustainer of His people is always standing at the door. He can create fresh witnesses to Himself in the most unlikely quarters, even as He raised

Great Expectations

up Paul from among the Pharisees and Luther from among the Mendicants. The Gospel of the grace of God has been disproved a great number of times—it has been attacked and wounded and beaten down and left for dead—but it survives by the power of an endless life. As Freeman the historian wrote: "The most decadent and superstitious form of Christianity has always within itself the perennial power of regeneration. For it has at its heart the redeeming Christ." Amid fightings within and fears without, the modern Church can still cry, *I know that my Redeemer liveth.* In the bleakest spiritual season, when all the fields we have tilled seem bound in bitter frost, our inward hope is renewed day by day. Who can guess the swift, incalculable quickening which Christ has in store for His despondent people? *Can spring be far behind?*

The Christian life is often described as a spiritual adventure, which faithful souls

Great Expectations

have courage to attempt. Perhaps it would be still more accurate to consider the Christian Church as the mighty venture of Christ Himself. For the Saviour of the world has entrusted the fulfilment of His mission to the whole fellowship of His disciples. When we watch this fellowship, as it appears organized amid human society, we must confess that nothing else on earth has had a history so chequered, so crowded with surprises and defeats and strange failures and amazing reformations and revivals. Yet we know also that Christ loves His Church. He gave Himself for it. He has involved Himself in its spiritual fortunes. He dwells in its Communion. He sustains and succours it by His living presence. This is why Christians must needs watch continually for the sign of the Son of Man in their midst. The love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord remains the supreme force in the universe, and this Divine passion lives embodied in

Great Expectations

the fellowship of the faithful. Ever and anon, through the smouldering embers and ashes of institutions, this hidden fire from heaven flames out and burns bright and shines clear. The Church carries in its bosom incalculable potencies. In one of his addresses, Lord Rosebery suggested that any day there might be born a fresh Cæsar or a fresh Newton, who would grow up to alter the course of human affairs. But who can tell how soon God may send His people a latter Luther, or a second Wesley, to reanimate our decrepit religion? Or He may illuminate all our economic problems by the gift of a fresh St. Francis, who would make us ashamed of covetousness and reveal to our astonished eyes the high calling of the simple and the poor. Expectancy means the gift of the morning star. If Christians know anything, they know that the heart of man is still young and the Spirit of God has not died out.

What is true for the Church is not less

Great Expectations

true for the individual. Phillips Brooks used to say that the real test of any life is its expectancy. What are our personal ambitions, our secret hopes for ourselves? To pile up more money, to plunge more feverishly into secular business, to win more visible success? Christ would have us covet earnestly His best gifts—to grow steadily more affectionate and long-suffering and pitiful, more humble and child-like and single-hearted and sincere, to be kept more peaceful in the midst of competition, to be more afraid of self-advertisement and more happy in self-denial, to spend our time and strength and substance more generously for the disinherited, to become more penetrated and possessed by God's love. The beatitude on them that do hunger and thirst after righteousness stands unrevoked. Yet how few believers have faith and courage to echo Francis Xavier's passionate prayer, *Amplius, Domine, amplius!* Great expectations would make us all saints; for in the

Great Expectations

spiritual order great expectations never go disappointed. It hath not entered into our hearts to conceive what surprises of grace and glory the Lord has prepared for us in the counsels of His everlasting love.

From its very nature, the Christian life is full of promises and possibilities without end. Whatever else on earth may grow stale or hackneyed, spiritual experience carries in itself the seeds of infinite variety. God's great revealing and redeeming acts in Jesus Christ are final indeed, but they are inexhaustible. The Eternal Spirit has manifested His personality once for all under the limits of space and time. But in each human life that manifestation is applied and unfolded by the presence of the same Spirit, interpreting the Gospel as though it were a fresh disclosure to each individual. That is why patient readers and lovers of God's Book meet with surprises on almost every page. Again and again they discover new treasures waiting for them, as they

Great Expectations

explore the deep words of Scripture. They know how often its simplest sentences prove to be also its profoundest. Some verse may lie in your memory for half a lifetime, but you never penetrate its meaning until the same experience comes to you in which the verse was born ; and then, perhaps quite suddenly, it grows transfigured and dazzles you with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. Sometimes in lonely hours of pain or loss a commonplace text begins to burn and glow afresh before our eyes, and in its ancient familiar words the Lord fulfils His promise, *Behold, I make all things new*. The greatest Christians have learned to draw day by day from this inexhaustible fountain, and they never open the Bible without a kindling of expectancy.

[For the Gospel is no legend out of the dead past, no story worn threadbare with repetition. Its message overflows with vital meaning, because it involves nothing less

Great Expectations

than the living God co-operating with the living soul. We know how faithful human friendship grows out of an intercourse between persons, which will result in fresh discoveries of affection and devotion as years go by. In like manner the communion of a Christian with Christ grows more intimate and more ardent, and leads on into more wonderful disclosures of the secrets of Divine love. So, again, the essence of praying involves the expectation of God's answer. We offer no true prayer unless we not only desire but wait for a reply—not always the granting of our request, but some real response from the Eternal Listener. Those who have become adepts in the sacred art of petition and intercession know that their prayers never fail to reach the heart of God. This is why one chief characteristic of a saint is his expectancy. For him, experience worketh hope—a hope that maketh not ashamed; and so he can repeat as his watchword of thanksgiving:

Great Expectations

“Glory to Thee for all the grace I have not tasted yet.”

The greatest of mortal expectations is immortality. That unspeakable hope has been haunting mankind since the twilight ages before history began. Look how the slope of yonder moorland bulges with the barrows which vanished races piled over their dead. Each mounded sepulchre bears witness to the strange fact that man, alone among animals, has persistently cherished a conviction that he is something more than animal. Suppose, for a moment, that these expectations of the life to come are a sheer delusion. If man has no hereafter and no Judge beyond the grave, what becomes of the vaunted dignity and value of human existence? Science, which shrivels the planet into a sand-grain in lonely space, announces that this small earth of ours was once too hot for living beings and within a measurable time must become too cold. Who can keep up enthusiasm

Great Expectations

about the future of a race "which began in a gas and will end in a glacier?" How can anything seem seriously worth while, if good and evil alike are to have one issue, if everything will be at last as though nothing had ever been? Yet consider the birds of the air. Their instinct to migrate always discovers somewhere a climate to match it. And has God made men in order to mock their deepest instinct? Has He endowed us with the power to love so passionately and faithfully, only that after a few brief years He may dissolve that very love into dust? Surely He has prepared a place for us, with those whom we count dearer than ourselves. If it were not so, He would have told us.

Christ Himself hardly ever stoops to argue about a future life. In His reply to the Sadducees, He grounds the proof of immortality upon the nature of that fellowship which had come into being between God and Abraham, who was called God's

Great Expectations

friend. For such Divine friendship possesses an eternal quality and value ; it enters already into that within the veil. And each man's personality persists through the welter of cosmic change, because God is the Lover no less than the Maker of his soul. When we read the Gospels, we commonly forget or ignore those great tacit assumptions which our Lord is habitually making. As a rule, He does not announce immortality, or reason about it : He quietly takes it for granted. In His parables and His promises He simply assumes the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. The New Testament as a whole has little meaning unless we interpret it in the light of that eternal future which is hanging over us all. Across the final page of every biography, however torn and blotted and stained, we can write the same colophon : " To be continued in the next world." Few modern sermons throb with the urgency of Richard Baxter, who preached " as a dying

Great Expectations

man to dying men ” ; yet that phrase of his still describes each preacher and each congregation. For the time is short, and it is shortening day by day. Our Christian judgments lose perspective and proportion unless we contemplate the things which are seen in their relation to the things which are not seen. In a little while we shall pass into that world where money is nothing and love is everything. And we can never set forth the Gospel of Christ, or serve our brothers in His spirit, until we realize that every one of them shares with us in a birth-right which death cannot destroy.

In some quarters to-day faith in man's immortality is being scornfully cast aside. The life to come is denounced as no better than “dope,” a doctrine invented to make the poor more docile in their present distress. From another point of view, novelists like Dickens have traced the subtle influence of great expectations upon human character ; they have shown us how a young man who

Great Expectations

discovers that he is heir to some golden fortune may be tempted to degenerate into a spendthrift or a snob. Nay, it has been urged against Christians that their very hope of heaven is tainted with self-seeking, that they embrace religion with an eye to personal enjoyment in paradise. They are charged with being mercenary and calculating, because they have respect to the recompense of their reward hereafter. But to speak thus is to travesty our deathless hope. For what does heaven imply for each humble believer? (What is the quality of that spiritual prize to which God's saints on earth aspire? The answer can be given in artless words: *We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.* And to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ means to be redeemed from our last stain of self-seeking, our last impulse of self-will. It means to be swept out of ourselves into the passion of the self-sacrifice of God. To us sinners Christ holds out the over-

Great Expectations

whelming promise that He will bring us—
through whatever stages of discipline and
purifying—"to find at last our perfect
happiness in the vision of His glory and the
unchecked communion of His love."

XXV

A DESIRE TO DEPART

Hardly anything in nature is so little understood as the migration of birds. On crisp autumn mornings, with a touch of early frost in the air, we watch the swallows gathering in flocks to make ready for their exodus. But who can explain the strange imperious instinct which bids them set out to seek a warmer continent? Who knows what steers them in their trackless flight? This annual ebb and flow of the feathered tide has been sung by poets and discussed by philosophers, has given rise to proverbs and entered into popular superstitions; yet a veteran ornithologist like Professor Newton confessed: "We must say of it still that our ignorance is immense." Even the

A Desire to Depart

migration routes of the birds date back to remote ages, when the areas of land and water were other than they are now. Birds still follow the ancient ways which their ancestors travelled towards the south. According to Weismann, their present fly-lines over the Mediterranean indicate the positions of the prehistoric land-bridges which once divided that great sea into lesser inland seas, and which the birds used for crossing it long millenniums ago. When we consider the fowls of the air, this mysterious migratory instinct, which yet finds a climate to match it, appears like a parable of the soul's desire to depart.

Our generation is often reproached for being so unsettled and restless. Since travel has been made easier and safer, people move about far more freely and population grows fluid in unwonted ways. The tramp and the gipsy at the bottom of society have their analogue in swarms of tourists and globe-trotters who consider

A Desire to Depart

themselves near the top. And yet this roving, adventurous spirit is in its essence as old as the hills. The impulse in a boy's blood which urges him to seafaring or exploring or colonizing descends from his forefathers who wandered when the world was young. For we were all nomads once, in the dim past—dwellers in tents, like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And though the coil of civilization entangles our spirits, ever and anon we wake up to realize that we are only encamped here, not domesticated. Rooted in the depths of human nature there survives that immortal, ineradicable instinct which makes man at his noblest a pilgrim and a stranger upon earth.

What multitudes of people we meet up and down England to-day, who feel that they have never yet found their right place. They try, indeed, to make the best of things, more or less patiently ; but in their hearts they are persuaded that they deserve a

A Desire to Depart

very different lot. Men tied to some difficult or distasteful business, women forced to earn a hard living, ministers with uncongenial congregations, lonely folk isolated from kindred and friends—they all cherish the same secret desire to depart from the narrow place where they are, to migrate into happier circumstances of life. And times come when they beat vain wings against the bars of the cage, when they pray—ah! how eagerly, wistfully, passionately—for some door to open a way of escape. And yet does not one secret of Christian prayer consist in this, that it is the offering up of our desires, as well as our requests, to God? (To pray in faith means that we surrender our very hopes and dreams to His Will, we lay our hidden longings on the altar of His holy and perfect Love. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding fills the hearts of His children as soon as they humbly accept His calling and election instead of their own.

A Desire to Depart

They grow content to live henceforth just where God pleases and just how God pleases. And they discover that those very circumstances against which they fret and chafe and rebel are only the clasp and pressure of the Everlasting Arms.

This desire to depart reaches out beyond the boundary of things seen and temporal. Through all human experience, and through the great literature which reflects that experience, there runs one deep refrain to which men can never stop their ears. Under the discordant music of this world we catch "the solemn canticle of death." There are many persons to-day indeed, who try to ignore the more solemn prospect of immortality. Certainly their own expectation of a future life burns dim. In place of a heaven above, the modern Communist holds out to us his millennium of material prosperity here below. Nay, not a few Christians seem ready to treat religion as though it were mainly an instrument of

A Desire to Depart

social reform. But the Gospel ceases to be a Gospel, when we narrow it to any earthly horizon. We cannot justify our faith in the love of God unless we believe in an eternal spiritual world, of which this world is the broken shadow—a world where love shall be all in all. If our Lord speaks few words to us about immortality, it is because He habitually takes it for granted. The pages of the New Testament thrill and palpitate with the powers of the world to come. And the truest Christians have all lived in sure and certain prospect of a better country, that is a heavenly.

It is noteworthy, indeed, that this expectation may take varied colours according to different moods and temperaments. Some believers have looked forward to their own departure with a kind of sacred curiosity. John Foster, for example, writes of “an ever-rising impatience of the soul to escape from this dark and sinful world and go out on the sublime adventure”;

A Desire to Depart

and he wonders what it will be like "to be past death—to have accomplished that one amazing act which we have yet undone before us, and are to do . . . to know what that awful and mysterious thing is, and that its pains and terrors are gone past for ever." Another saint who hungered and thirsted after righteousness had faith to praise God because the day was at hand when he would have said farewell to all his doubts and sorrows, he would have endured his last temptation, he would be cleansed from his last sin. There are others, worn out with many disappointments and failures, who look wistfully towards the birthday of their new beginning, when they will make a fresh start in life that is life indeed. Others, again, after weary years of suffering, lie humbly waiting for God's leave to die. There are eager, importunate spirits who batter the gates of heaven with storms of prayer and cry, like Lacordaire with his parting breath, " Lord, Lord,

A Desire to Depart

open unto me." While many others have laboured on, "patient through life's long-drawn reprieve," until now in their old age they stretch out trembling hands in desire of the further shore, because it is peopled already with those whom they have loved so tenderly and lost for a little while. As our years multiply, all earthly partings appear as a preparation for the great Meeting.

So not alone we land upon that shore ;
'Twill be as though we had been there before.
We shall meet more we know
Than we can meet below,
And find our rest like some returning dove,
And be at home at once with our Eternal Love.

For the ripest and for the simplest Christian alike, it comes true that where his treasure is, there will his hopes and thoughts be also. The desire to depart means ultimately nothing less than a desire to be with Christ, Who is Himself our Beginning and our End, our First and our Last. So, in the catacombs at Rome, primitive disciples pictured their ideal of paradise

A Desire to Depart

under the emblem of the hart and the water-brooks—the hart no longer panting and breathless but tranquil and satisfied, quenching immortal thirst in that river of the water of life which proceedeth out of the Throne of God.

EPILOGUE

DIES IRÆ—DIES AMORIS

“ Thus shall the Spiritual Thirst of Christ have an end. For this is the Spiritual Thirst of Christ: the love-longing that lasteth, and ever shall, till we see that sight on Doomsday. For we that shall be saved and shall be Christ’s joy and His bliss, some be yet here and some be to come, and so shall some be, unto that day. Therefore this is His thirst and love-longing, to have us altogether whole in Him, to His bliss. . . . For we be not now as fully whole in Him as we shall be then. . . .

“ Thus He hath ruth and compassion on us, and He hath longing to have us; but His wisdom and His love suffereth not the end to come till the best time. . . .

“ There be deeds evil done in our sight,

Epilogue

and so great harms taken, that it seemeth to us that it were impossible that ever it should come to good end. And upon this we look, sorrowing and mourning therefor, so that we cannot resign ourselves unto the blissful beholding of God as we should do. And the cause of this is that the use of our reason is now so blind, so low, and so simple, that we cannot know that high marvellous Wisdom, the Might and the Goodness of the blissful Trinity. And thus signifieth He when He saith: *Thou shalt see thyself that all manner of things shall be well.* As if He said: *Take now heed faithfully and trustingly, and at the last end thou shalt see it in fulness of joy.*

“ And thus in these same words. . . . I understand a mighty comfort of all the works of our Lord God that are yet to come. There is a Deed the which the blessed Trinity shall do in the last Day. . . .

“ This is that Great Deed ordained of our Lord God from without beginning,

Epilogue

treasured and hid in His blessed breast, only known to Himself: by which He shall make all things to be well.

“ For like as the blissful Trinity made all things out of nought, right so the same blessed Trinity shall make well all that is not well.

“ And in this sight I marvelled greatly and beheld our Faith, marvelling thus: Our Faith is grounded in God’s word, and it belongeth to our Faith that we believe that God’s word shall be saved in all things; and one point of our Faith is that many creatures shall be condemned: as angels that fell out of Heaven for pride, which be now fiends; and many in earth that die out of the Faith of Holy Church: that is to say, they that be heathen men; and also many that have received Christendom and live unchristian lives and so die out of charity: all these shall be condemned to hell without end, as Holy Church teacheth me to believe. And all this so standing,

Epilogue

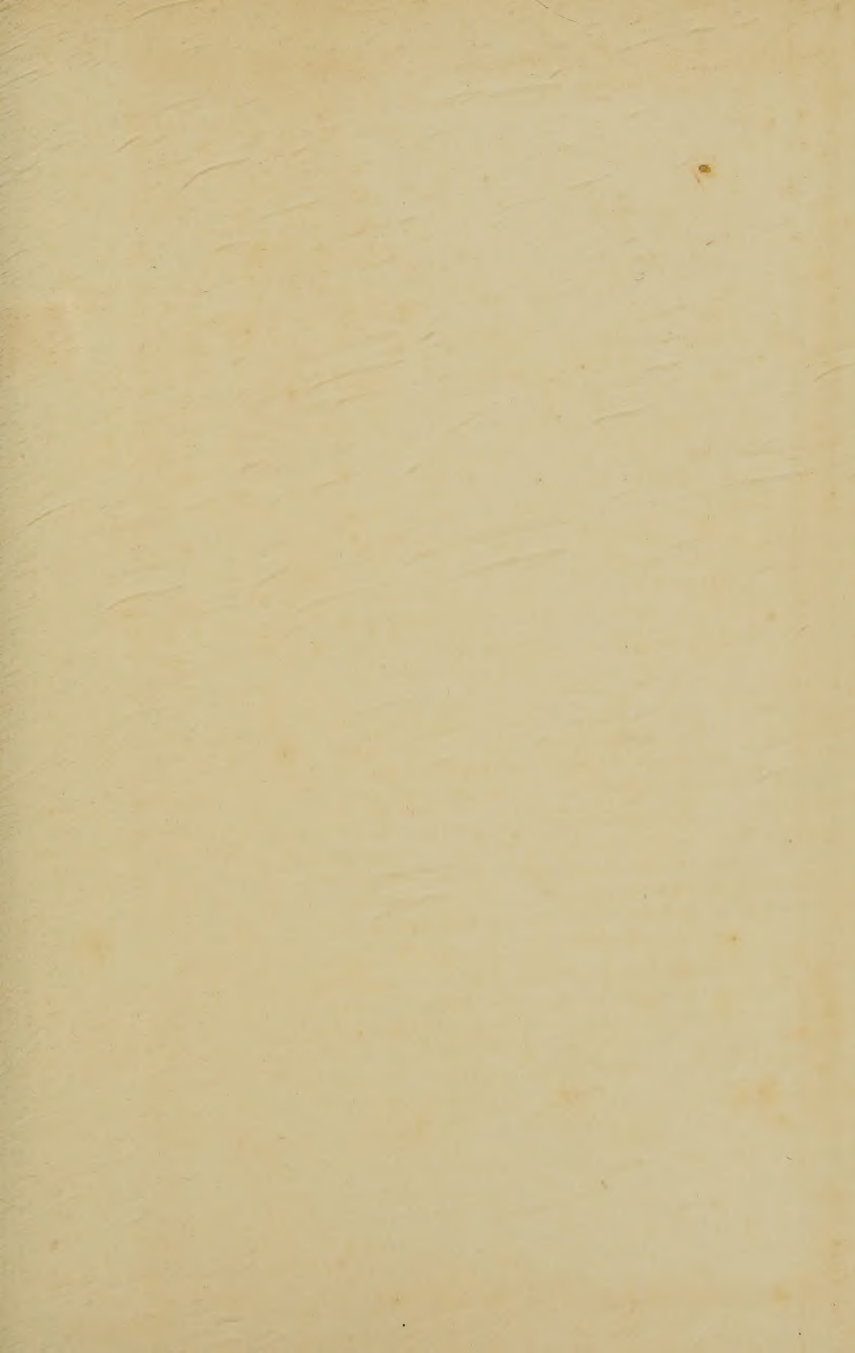
methought it was impossible that all manner of things should be well. . . .

“And as to this I had no other answer in showing of our Lord God but this :
That which is impossible to thee is not impossible to Me : I shall save my word in all things and I shall make all things well.

“For this is the Great Deed that our Lord shall do, in which Deed He shall save His word and He shall make all well that is not well. How it shall be done there is no creature beneath Christ that knoweth it, nor shall know it till it is done.”

*Revelations of Divine Love. Recorded by Julian, anchoress at
Norwich. Anno Domini, 1373.—Chaps. xxxi, xxxii.*

AT TU, DOMINE, QUI SALUS ET VITA ES,
QUI OMNIUM JUDEX VENTURUS ES,
DELE IN OPERE TUO QUOD MEUM EST; IN MEO
QUOD TUUM NON EST;
TUNC COGNOSCE BONUS ET IGNOSCE.





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